



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



**TECHNICAL REPORT  
NUMBER 1**

# Growing Up in Ireland

National Longitudinal Study of Children

## CHILD COHORT - Qualitative Study

Technical Report on the 9-Year Qualitative Study

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National Longitudinal Study of Children

## TECHNICAL REPORT ON THE 9-YEAR QUALITATIVE STUDY

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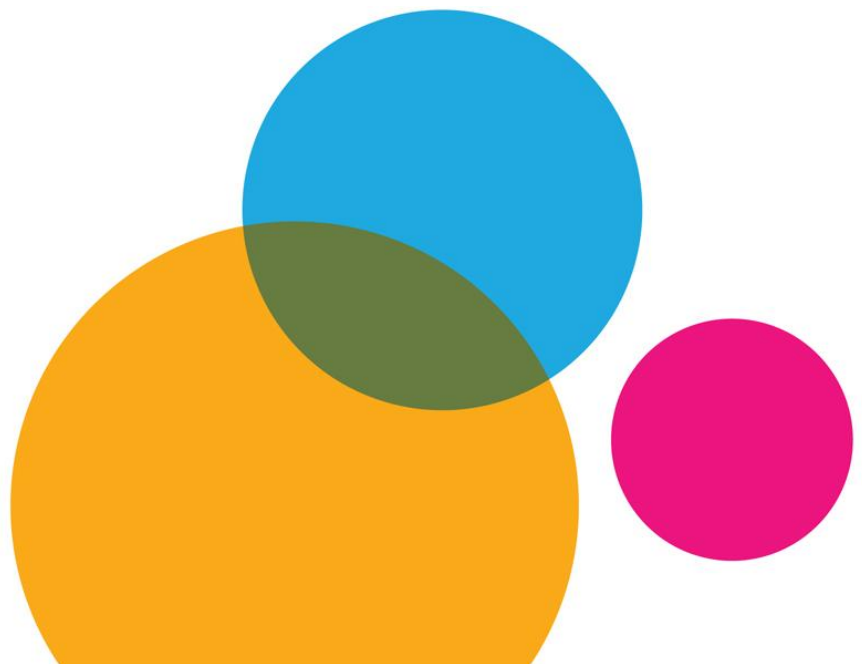
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# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION





## 1.1 BACKGROUND

***Growing Up in Ireland*** is the national longitudinal study of children in Ireland, launched in 2006. 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. The main aim of the study is to describe the lives of two representative samples of children in Ireland and how they are developing in the current social, economic, and cultural environment. This information will be used to assist in policy formation and in the provision of services which will ensure that all children will have the best possible start in life. The study incorporates a mixed methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, to gain a holistic understanding of children's lives in Ireland.

The first phase of the study extends over seven years and follows the progress of two groups of children: 8,500 nine-year-olds and 11,100 nine-month-olds. During this time two sweeps of quantitative data are conducted with each group of children. Smaller-scale qualitative studies, each involving 120 families drawn from the main cohorts, take place shortly after each sweep. The information presented here focuses on the first wave of qualitative research conducted between April and August 2008 with a sample of 120 families from the nine-year cohort of ***Growing Up in Ireland***.

## 1.2 AIMS OF THE STUDY

***Growing Up in Ireland*** has nine stated objectives, as follows:

1. to describe the lives of children in Ireland, to establish what is typical and normal as well as what is atypical and problematic;
2. to chart the development of children over time, to examine the progress and well-being of children at critical periods from birth to adulthood;
3. to identify the key factors that, independently of others, most help or hinder children's development;
4. to establish the effects of early childhood experiences on later life;
5. to map dimensions of variation in children's lives;
6. to identify the persistent adverse affects that lead to social disadvantage and exclusion, educational difficulties, ill health and deprivation;
7. to obtain children's views and opinions on their lives to inform policy-making;
8. to provide a bank of data on the whole child; and
9. to provide evidence for the creation of effective and responsive policies and services for children and families.

The conceptual framework adopted by ***Growing Up in Ireland*** emphasises children's connectedness to the world in which they live. The study embraces a dynamic systems perspective founded upon five insights from different disciplines: ecology, dynamic connectedness, probabilism, period effects, and the active role or agency of the child in the developmental process. The bioecological model proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner is a key tool in operationalising this perspective. This model highlights the importance of considering the multi-faceted and multi-layered nature of the influences on development over the life course (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

***Growing Up in Ireland*** also embraces the whole-child perspective which is central to the National Children's Strategy (2000). Accordingly, in approaching the design and conduct of the study, an attempt is made to see each child as a person, not just as an aggregate of variables and outcomes.

To emphasise this conceptualisation of children and in recognition of children's agency in their own lives, the qualitative study gives a more rounded picture of the children as individuals to get a stronger sense of the complexity and diversity of each child's experience of the world. The whole study is child-centred in that child issues and child outcomes are the primary focus.



### 1.3 METHODOLOGY

A total of 120 families from the nine-year cohort participated in the first data-collection wave of the qualitative study. The sample is not representative of all nine-year-olds in Ireland; hence it cannot be claimed that the qualitative sample is speaking for all children. However, the sample selected was drawn from the 8,500 child respondents in the quantitative study forming the nine-year-old cohort, with reference to the characteristics of the achieved sample. The sample was purposive and stratified according to socio-economic status, gender, urban/rural location and family type. The sampling design is discussed in more detail in section 2 of this report.

The qualitative study with children and their parents complements the findings of the quantitative study by exploring further the same key domains. The qualitative component maps the quantitative domains by focusing on the child's experiences and perspectives in relation to: Wellness, Health and Physical Development; Child Functioning; Child Relationships; Growing Up; Family and Parenting; and Community, Neighbourhood and Sense of Citizenship. The interviews with the parents centre on the following themes: their perception of their child; parent and child relationship; being a parent in Ireland; use of services; family decision-making; and concerns and aspirations for their children.

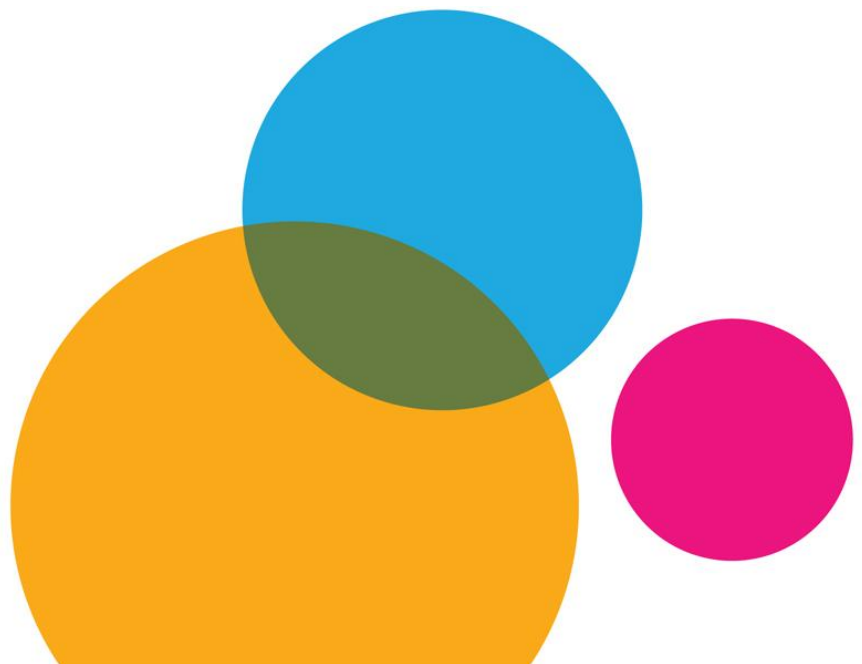
The schedule developed for the qualitative study consisted of two components: one interview for the children and one for the parents. The selection of methods was informed by the literature review (Harris & Greene, 2011) and guided by an advisory panel of experts in qualitative research. In addition, a panel of children established by **Growing Up in Ireland**, the Children's Advisory Forum (CAF), was involved in the design and selection of the methods. The CAF is made up of 84 children who sit on 12 committees in schools across Ireland. The developmental appropriateness of the methods was tested by the CAF and through pre-pilot and pilot assessment.

The child's interview was semi-structured and designed to be both interesting and enjoyable for the nine-year-old participants, while also gathering important information for the study. A variety of prompts and game-like elements were interspersed with the interview questions. To cater for children with diverse abilities, a mixture of visual and verbal methods was also employed. Photographs taken by the family specifically for the study were used as prompts throughout the interviews with the parents. Bearing in mind the longitudinal nature of the study, the methods chosen captured the children's and parents' current views and experiences and their anticipation of life when the child is 13, the age at which they will be interviewed again as part of **Growing Up in Ireland**. The qualitative protocols are outlined in section 3 of this report.



# Chapter 2

## SAMPLE DESIGN







## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

A total of 120 families from the nine-year cohort participated in the first wave of data-collection for the qualitative study. This section describes the sampling approach that was adopted for the qualitative study with the nine-year old cohort and describes the profile of the achieved sample.

## 2.2 SAMPLING APPROACH

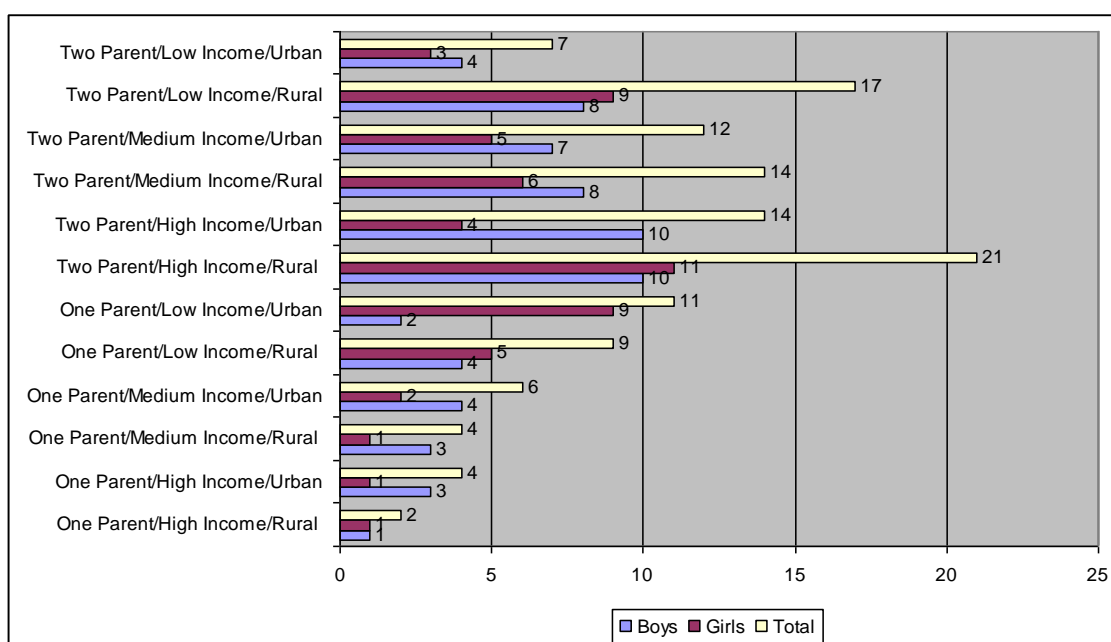
During the quantitative study, the families were invited to sign a consent form to have their names put forward for selection into the qualitative sample. Almost two-thirds (65.9%) of the families forming the nine-year-old cohort (8,500 in total) gave their consent to be put forward for selection. Of these families, 158 families were selected and invited to participate in the qualitative study. An introductory letter, information leaflet and consent form with prepaid envelope were sent to each of the families, copies of which are included in Appendices R, T, and U in the Fieldwork Manual (Appendix 2). The mail shot was followed up with a phone call to each family from a member of the research team.

## 2.3 RESPONSE RATE

Of the 158 families contacted, 120 families participated in the qualitative study, giving a response rate of 75.9%. Two of these families included nine-year-old twin siblings, both of whom were interviewed, bringing the total number of child respondents to 122.

## 2.4 SAMPLE PROFILE

The qualitative sample was purposive and stratified, based on the characteristics of the main sample. Stratification of the families in the qualitative study means that detailed case studies of children and their families with particular socio-demographic profiles could be developed, enriching the quantitative findings relevant to such groups. As shown in *Figure 2.1*, the qualitative sample was stratified according to socio-economic status (i.e. high, medium, and low-income), urban/rural location, and family type (i.e. one or two resident parents). The income status of one family was missing. The largest category of children in the sample (17.2%) was a two-parent family with high income in a rural area. The breakdown of the sample across gender was 58 girls and 64 boys ( $N = 122$ ).



**Figure 2.1: The qualitative sample classified across socio-economic status, rural/urban location, family type and gender**

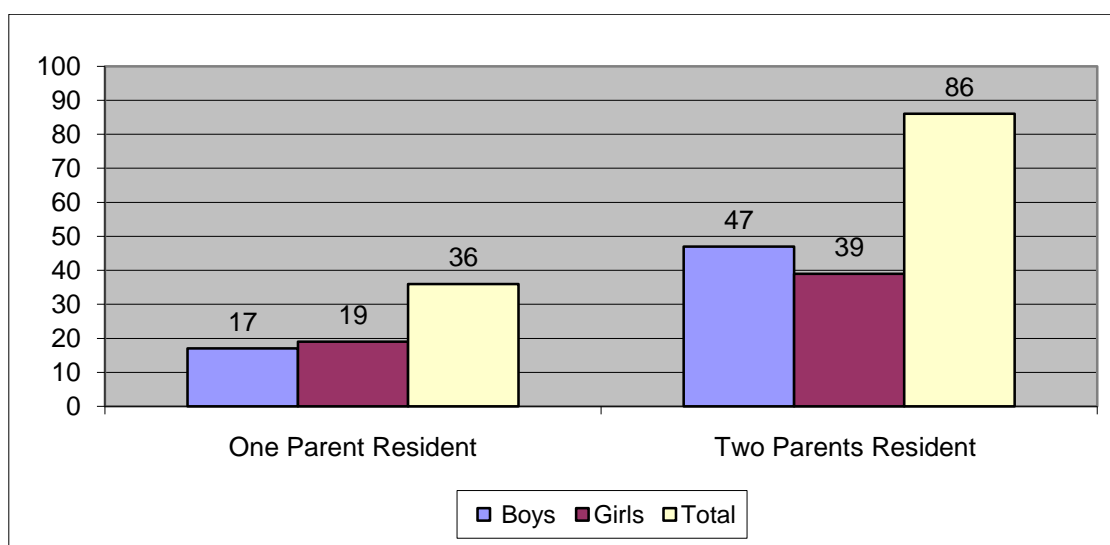


## 2.5 AGE AND GENDER OF CHILDREN

The children were aged between nine and ten when they were interviewed for the qualitative study. This interview took place within six months of the quantitative interview within the home. A total of 58 (47.5%) girls and 64 (52.5%) boys participated in the study. These proportions are similar to the gender breakdown in the population.

## 2.6 FAMILY STRUCTURE

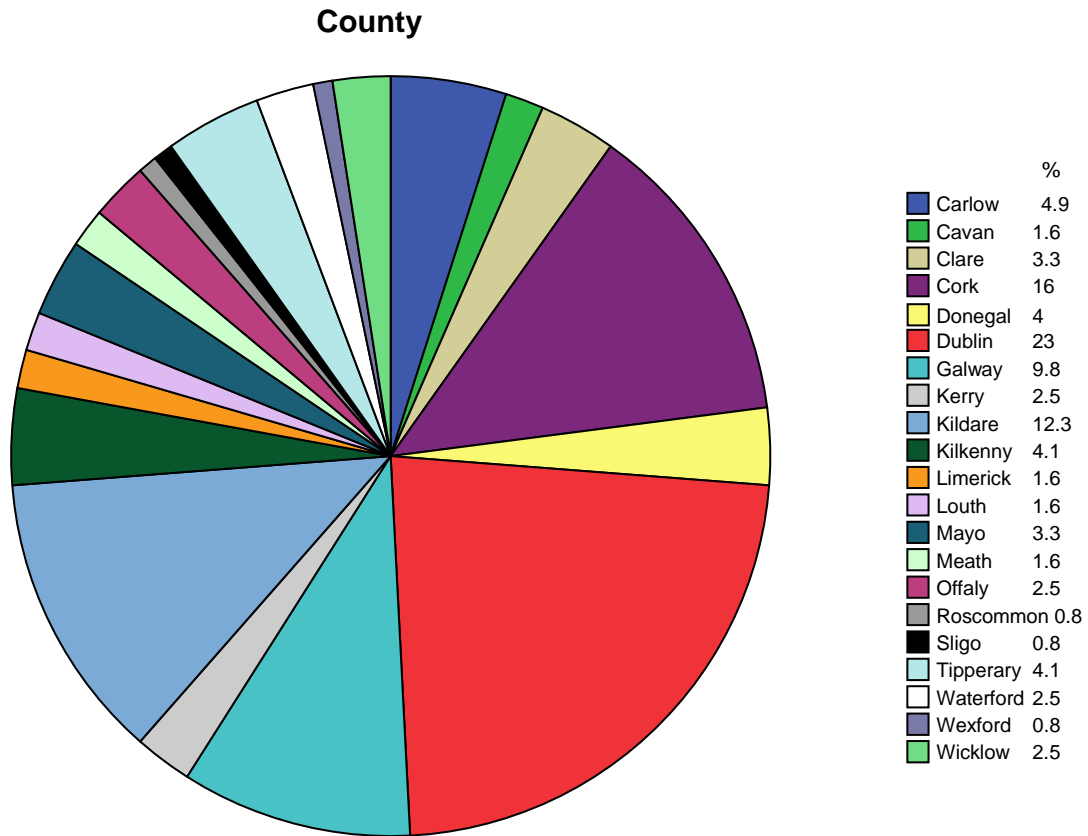
The qualitative sample included children from families with two parents resident and children from families with one parent resident. As shown in *Figure 2.2*, of the 122 child respondents, fewer than three-quarters (70.5%) were living with two parents resident in the family home and almost one-third (29.5%) were living with one parent resident in the family home.



**Figure 2.2: The qualitative sample classified across family structure and gender**

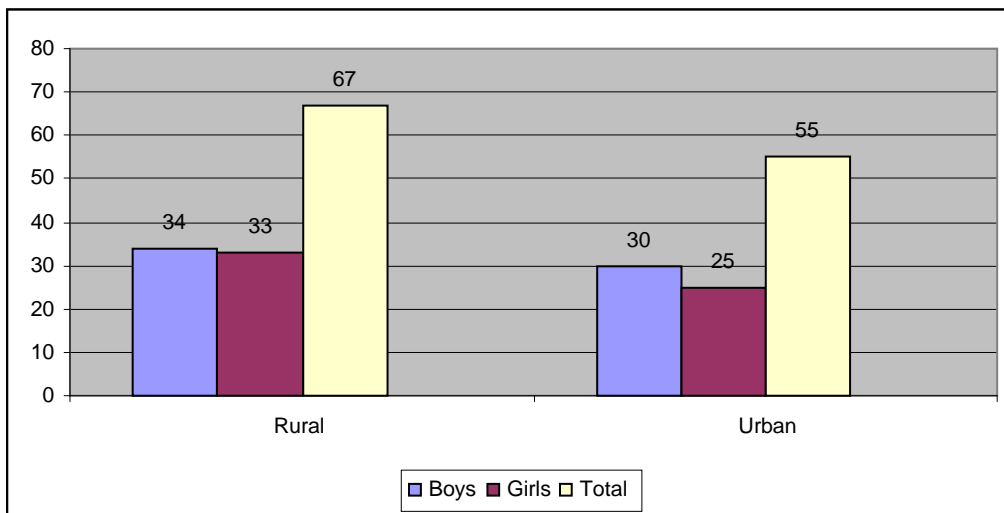
## 2.7 GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF THE SAMPLE

Although the qualitative sample was purposive, it was not intended to be nationally representative. However, as shown in *Figure 2.3*, children from 21 of the 26 counties were represented. Of the 122 children, 67 (55%) were living in rural areas and 55 (45%) in urban areas.



**Figure 2.3: The qualitative sample classified according to county**

Figure 2.4 shows the qualitative sample classified across rural and urban areas and gender. The same classification as used in the quantitative study was applied to the qualitative study. Children were categorised as coming from an urban area if they lived in a town of a population of 10,000 or more, or in one of the main cities: Cork, Dublin, Galway, Limerick or Waterford. Urban areas in the county of Dublin were also included in this category. Families resident in country areas, villages of between 200 and 1,499 people, and towns of between 1,500 and 9,999 people were categorised as living in rural areas.

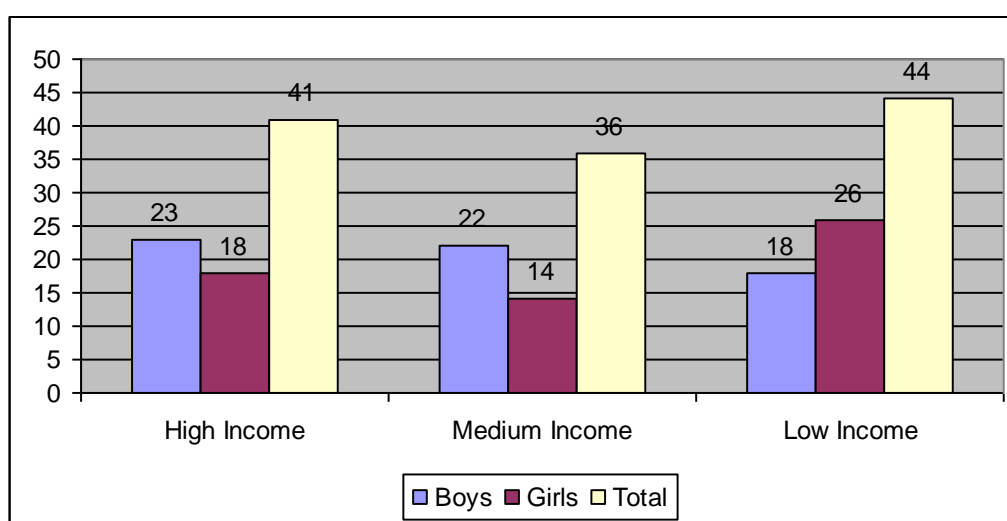


**Figure 2.4: The qualitative sample classified across rural and urban areas and gender**



## 2.8 SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Annual income was taken from data collected in the *Growing Up in Ireland* quantitative study. Based on the number of adults and children in the household and net annual income, equivalised income was calculated. The equivalised income allows the comparison of living standards between households that vary in size and composition. This adjustment reflects the fact that a family of several people requires a higher income than a single person in order for both households to enjoy a comparable standard of living. This adjustment was broken down into three categories, as follows: Low Income was up to €13,757.83; Middle Income was between €13,757.84 and €20,494.95; and High Income was €20,494.96 or more. As shown in *Figure 2.5*, over one-third of the children were from low-income families (36.3%), 29.7% from medium-income families and one-third (33.8%) from high-income families. The income status of one family was unavailable.



**Figure 2.5: The qualitative sample classified across income**

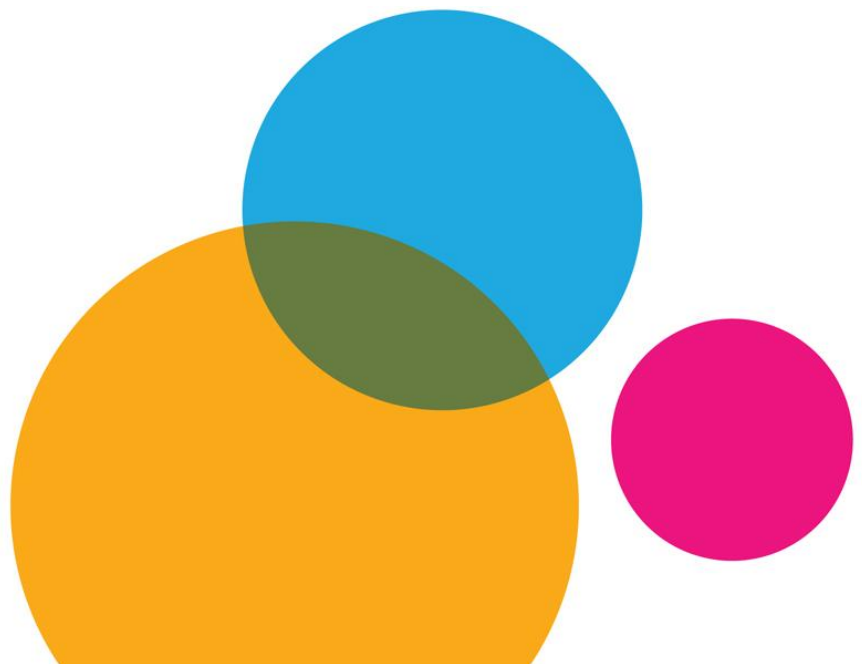
## 2.9 DIVERSITY AMONG THE CHILDREN

The children included in the qualitative sample were from a variety of backgrounds, taking into account family structure, socio-economic status and geographical locations. Of the 122 children in the study, the majority (97.5%) were from Irish backgrounds, including one child from the Traveller community. Three children were from non-Irish backgrounds. Five children (4.1%) were experiencing a chronic illness or disability. Nine children (7.3%) had a specific learning difficulty, including dyslexia, autism, Asperger's syndrome, dyspraxia, or a difficulty with visuo-spatial awareness. Ten children (8.2%) had someone in their immediate family with a chronic illness or disability and four children (3.3%) were living with a parent experiencing a mental-health problem.



# Chapter 3

## METHOD





### 3.1 DESIGN OF THE QUALITATIVE PROTOCOLS

This section describes the design of the qualitative study and the methods used to explore the key domains with the nine-year cohort. A lengthy preparatory stage preceded the choice of research methods to ensure that the most appropriate methods were selected to address the research questions. This groundwork stage involved: the establishment of a panel of experts in qualitative research; a review of qualitative research methods described in published research literature; the involvement of children in the design of methods through the Children's Advisory Forum; pre-pilot and pilot testing, and refinement of methods. The research design was subject to approval by the National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland (NLSCI) Research Ethics Committee, and ethical approval was obtained for both the pilot and main qualitative fieldwork.

### 3.2 DOMAINS OF THE QUALITATIVE STUDY

The areas explored in the qualitative study map onto the domains of the main quantitative study to provide a deeper understanding of the children's experiences of being nine years old in Ireland and their parents' experiences of their parenting role. There were separate schedules for the child and the parents, each consisting of specific questions addressing the domains to be explored and probing questions which were used where appropriate to explore responses in more depth. The order of the themes was arranged so that potentially sensitive areas were placed later in the interview when it was expected the child would feel more relaxed and comfortable talking to the interviewer. The qualitative schedule is included in Appendix 1. An overview of the main themes explored in the interview with the nine-year-old child is provided below:

1. *Wellness, health and physical development:* What is children's understanding of the factors that help or hinder them in being physically healthy? What feelings and interpretations do they attach to being well or unwell? What is their understanding of physical development and their perception of body image?
2. *Child functioning:* What is the children's understanding of emotional development? How do they recognise different emotions and feelings? What perception do they have of themselves and their daily life? What hopes, fears and aspirations do they have?
3. *Child relationships:* How do the children perceive their relationships with friends? What is the children's understanding of the factors that help or hinder the development of peer relationships?
4. *Growing up:* What is the children's understanding of growing up? How do they perceive the transition from nine years to 13 years of age? How do they imagine they will be at age 13?
5. *Family and parenting:* What is the children's understanding of their family's dynamic, their role and relationships within the family? What is their understanding of the role of a parent? What do they perceive as positive parenting?
6. *Community, neighbourhood and sense of citizenship:* How do the children perceive their local community and neighbourhood? What is their understanding of a positive community life in Ireland? What aspects of life in Ireland do they enjoy and what would they like to change?

The parents were interviewed after their child and encouraged, where possible, to find a place for the interview where they could not be heard by the child. The aim of the qualitative component with parents was to gain further understanding of what it is like being the parent of a nine-year-old child growing up in Ireland. Certain questions were addressed to both children and parents, including those on parent-child relationships, for example, while others were asked of either the child or the parents only. The strategy allowed for the maximum range of data without over-burdening participants. The themes that were explored in the parents' interview include:



1. *Parents' perception of the child:* How do parents view their child's personality, interests, nature and temperament?
2. *Parent-child relationship:* What factors support or prevent the parents and child from doing things together? What types of everyday activities do the child and parent do together? What places and spaces are important in their relationship?
3. *Perception of being a parent:* What is the parents' understanding of being a parent in Ireland? What rewards, difficulties or challenges do parents face? What supports do parents avail of to help them in their parenting role?
4. *Family decision-making:* How are decisions made in the family? What level of involvement, if any, has the child in the decision-making process?
5. *Parental concerns and aspirations for their children:* What concerns do parents have for their children at nine years of age and as they grow older? What do parents aspire for their children as they grow up in Ireland? What are the hopes and dreams they have for them in the future?

### 3.3 METHODS USED DURING THE CHILD'S INTERVIEW

The child's semi-structured interview was designed to be both interesting and fun for the nine-year-old participants, adopting a multi-method participatory approach, which allowed the children to express themselves through a variety of alternative forms of communication. These techniques, each of which is described below, included: ice-breaker activities, draw-and-write techniques, worksheets and exercises, visual and verbal prompts, and essay and letter writing. A copy of these visual methods is included with the qualitative protocol in Appendix 1.

#### 3.3.1 ICE-BREAKER ACTIVITIES

Two ice-breaker techniques were used at the start of the child's interview: "My Time Capsule" and "My Passport". Participants were first introduced to the concept of creating a time capsule. They were provided with a poster tube and invited to create a time capsule in which to place all the products of the activities, drawings and exercises created during the interview. The children were encouraged to personalise their capsules using markers, crayons, and colouring pencils.

The children were also presented with the opportunity to create their own time-travel passport. For this activity, they were asked to complete a blank passport card, where they filled in details of their name, age and address, and listed the music, movies, food, colours and hobbies that they liked. They also recorded the one thing they liked the most and the one thing they hated the most. Each child was also invited to have their photograph taken by the interviewer, with an instant camera, to be put onto the passport card.

These techniques were relatively undemanding for the children and served a dual purpose: first, to ease participants into the study by generating non-taxing talking points, such as favourite food, and second, to help participants understand the longitudinal nature of the study, by explaining that an interviewer would return at the next data-collection wave with the time capsule containing all their completed work sheets, including their passport, so that they could see what aspects of themselves were different or still the same.

#### 3.3.2 DRAW-AND-WRITE TECHNIQUE

The draw-and-write technique involved inviting children to draw or write a response to a question, rather than only reply verbally. The structure of the interview stressed the importance of allowing time for the children to interpret the meaning and context of their drawings or written work. The technique was used to explore various themes throughout the semi-structured interview with the child, including:



wellness, health and physical development; child functioning; family and parenting; and community, neighbourhood and sense of citizenship. With regard to wellness and health, the children were invited to write or draw those factors contributing to keeping them well or making them unwell. Further on in the interview, the draw-and-write technique was again used under the domain of child functioning to elicit the child's views around their hopes and fears for the future. The interviewer invited the child to draw or write their hopes and fears for the future on a "Wishes and Fears" list. To introduce the theme of family, the interviewer invited the child to draw a picture of or write down on a worksheet the members of their family. To explore the domain of community, neighbourhood and sense of citizenship, each child was invited to draw a picture or write down what the child liked and disliked in their neighbourhood, which was then discussed in the interview.

### 3.3.3 VISUAL PROMPTS

Visual prompts such as pictures and photographs were used to aid the exploration of the following themes with the children: wellness, health and physical development; child functioning; and family and parenting.

Pictorial images from the Children's Body Image Scale (CBIS; Truby & Paxton, 2002) were used with the nine-year-old children to approach the topic of physical development and body image. The CBIS was developed for use with children aged 7-12 years (Truby & Paxton). It involves two pictorial scales, one depicting boys and one depicting girls, representing standard percentile curves for Body Mass Index (BMI) for healthy children. The CBIS measures the accuracy of body-size perception by asking a child to select a body size most like their own from a range of picture-drawings of children of known BMI and comparing the selection with the child's actual BMI. Each child was asked to select which picture represented what they believed to be the healthiest size for a nine-year-old boy or girl.

A series of six photographs illustrating facial expressions was developed to spark discussions with the children around feelings and to gauge a sense of their socio-emotional development and coping strategies. The children were asked to write under each photograph what feeling they felt was being depicted.

To explore the child's perception of parenting, each child was shown a trigger picture depicting a magician's wand. The child was then asked to imagine that he or she had special powers and describe any situations or rules at home that he or she might wish to change.

### 3.3.4 ACTIVITIES & WORKSHEET EXERCISES

Four worksheets were used during the children's interviews to explore different domains. Each of the four worksheets is discussed below.

The first worksheet, "My Hand", was used to introduce the child to the theme of child functioning and explore self-perception. Explaining the concept of hand- and fingerprints as being unique to an individual, the interviewer invited the child to draw around his or her own hand on a blank worksheet and write down a word for each finger that described who they were. The interviewer then asked the child to interpret those words he or she had chosen.

The second worksheet was an adaptation of the widely used Cantril's Self-Anchoring Ladder (Cantril, 1965). This is a measurement technique that asks people to rate their present, past and anticipated future satisfaction with life on a scale anchored by their own identified values. This measurement tool has been previously modified for use with children to attempt to gauge children's subjective well-being in terms of their satisfaction with themselves and their lives (UNICEF, 2007; WHO, 2004). For the purpose of our study, we created the "Life Ladder" worksheet. The interviewer described the concept of the life-satisfaction ladder to each child, explaining that the top of the ladder, 10, represented the best possible life for the child and the bottom, 0, was the worst possible life for the child. The children were then asked to place a sticker on the rung of the ladder that they felt best described how their life was at nine years of age. The interviewer then asked each child to explain the reasons behind his or her choice.





To explore the child's interests, hobbies and activities and to ascertain whether the child was involved in structured or unstructured activities, the study team developed a visual chart, called "My Activities Calendar", in which the children could map the different extra-curricular and play activities they were involved with each day of the week. The interviewer used the visual chart as a prompt to introduce a number of questions from the interview schedule regarding play, activities, hobbies, peer relationships and bullying.

The fourth worksheet used during the children's interviews was another visual chart to look at children's perception of their relationships with family members. The "My Family and Me" map was adapted from the concept of the Five Field Map and the Ecomap (Egg, Schratz-Hadwich, Trubswasser, & Walker, 2004; Mann & Tolfree, 2003; Sturgess, Dunn, & Davies, 2001; Hill, Laybourn, & Borland, 1996) as a visual prompt to explore children's perception of their relationships and emotional closeness with family members. The map is comprised of five concentric rings with "Me" in the centre. The "Me" in the centre represents the child. Each ring represents the degree of closeness and strength of relationship. As the rings move outwards from the centre, the degree of closeness and strength of the relationship declines. The interviewer asked the children to think about their relationship with everyone in their family and map these relationships on the worksheet in terms of their strength and closeness. Each child was then asked to explain the positions of family members on the map.

### 3.3.5 ESSAY WRITING

During the interviews, data was collected from the children through two essay and letter writing techniques. To explore their perceptions of growing up and becoming a teenager, the children were asked to write a few sentences entitled "*When I am 13 years old*". Once the child had completed their written piece, they were asked to verbally interpret it.

The children were also invited to compose their own individual letter to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. Therein they were asked to describe what things that they, if they were in charge of the country, would do to make life better for children in Ireland. It was explained to the children that the minister might not have the opportunity to read the letter personally but that the study team would compile all the ideas from the children's letters in a report which would be submitted to the minister's office.

## 3.4 METHODS USED DURING THE PARENTS' INTERVIEW

The parents of the children participated in a semi-structured interview. Both parents were interviewed in 57 cases (47.5%), including the parents of both sets of twins; the study child's mother only in 57 cases (47.5%), and the study child's father only in four cases (3.3%); data from two parent interviews (1.7%) could not be analysed. The interviewers followed an interview schedule. The interview included the use of photographs, as described below.

### 3.4.1 THE PHOTOGRAPHS

In the weeks prior to the interviewer visiting the children's homes, each of the families was provided with one disposable flash camera with 24 exposures. The parents and the child were encouraged to work together to use the camera to take photographs that they felt depicted something about their relationship. Suggestions included: everyday and/or special activities that they do together; barriers preventing them for doing things together; places and spaces that were important in their relationships; future hopes and aspirations. Two copies of the photographs were developed, the first for the family to keep and the second copy for use during the interview. The photographs were shown to the parents and they were asked to interpret each one. The technique served as a gentle ice-breaker into the interview and also generated useful data that could be further explored throughout the interview.



# Chapter 4

## DATA COLLECTION





## 4.1 FIELDWORK

The qualitative data were collected over a four-month period. Five interviewers conducted the fieldwork for the qualitative interviews with the nine-year cohort between April and August 2008. Each of the interviewers was a psychologist or social science researcher with experience in researching the views of children and families. The interviewers were vetted by the Garda Central Vetting Unit before becoming involved in the study. Before the start of fieldwork, the study team provided training to each of the interviewers in the ethics of carrying out research with children and handling and responding to sensitive issues that may arise during interviews. The study team also commissioned a specialist to provide further training to the interviewers in child protection procedures, following *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (DOHC, 1999) and the ethical guidelines of the Children's Research Centre, TCD. The training manual provided to the fieldworkers is in Appendix 2.

## 4.2 ADMINISTERING THE INTERVIEW

At the initial stage of the research process, the study team obtained informed consent from the child's parents and the assent of the child to participate in the study. The family's right to withdraw from the study at any stage was respected. The interviews with the child and the parents took place in the child's home. Each interview was recorded using a digital dictaphone. Data generated from the interviews included audio files, transcripts, field notes and visual data such as photographs and worksheets.

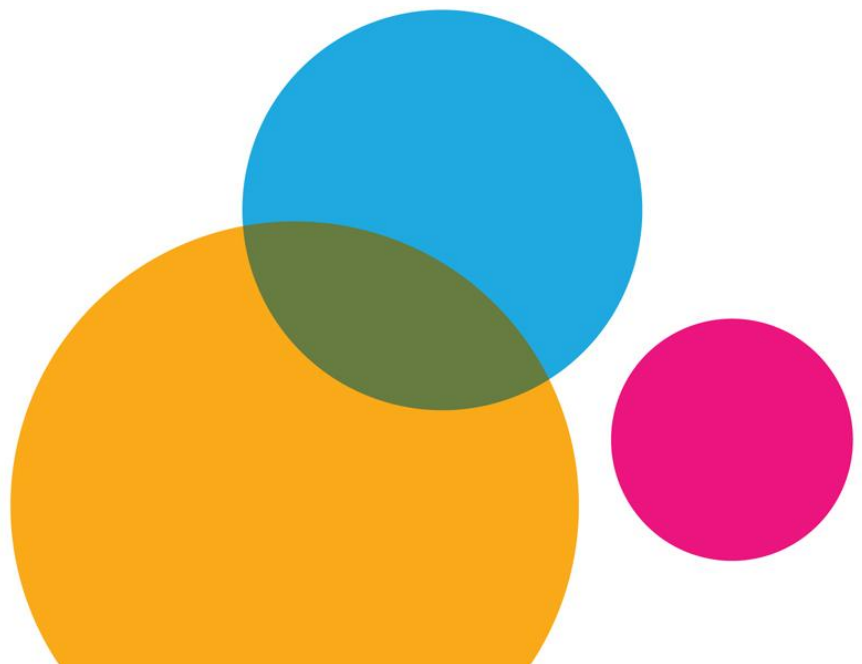
The interviews with the children were conducted by the interviewers in the presence of another adult from the household, consistent with the child protection procedures of the study. The length of time to administer the child's interview ranged from approximately 45 to 100 minutes. The length of each interview was dependent on a number of factors, including the child's temperament – whether the child was shy, confident, talkative, and so on – and their interest in drawing their responses. Where children were shy and less verbal, the length of the interview was generally shorter (45 to 60 minutes). Some children were very interested in drawing and put much detail into their pictures, which added to the length of parts of the interview. As the interviews were conducted in family homes, there was some unavoidable interjection by other family members despite the efforts of the interviewers, though none to an extent that seriously affected the interview.

The parents' interview took approximately 30 minutes. In the case of two-parent families, both parents were invited to be interviewed together. The interviewers were asked to be flexible when making appointments to encourage the participation of both parents.



# Chapter 5

## DATA ANALYSIS





## 5.1 DATA MANAGEMENT

Each of the child and parent interviews was fully transcribed by the research team and additional experienced transcribers who were sourced to help manage the volume of data. All transcribers were vetted by the Garda Central Vetting Unit before becoming involved in the study. The full transcriptions, field notes, observations and materials generated during the interviews formed the dataset for analysis. For data management, the study team used the NVivo software package (QSR, 2009).

## 5.2 ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

The principal aims of the qualitative study were: to complement the findings emerging from the quantitative study, to document the complexity and diversity of children's and their families' lives, and to address policy-relevant questions that cannot be addressed within the larger survey. To achieve these aims, the qualitative study adopts a *complementary strengths* stance on mixed methods, whereby the studies address different aspects of the same questions. The analysis of the qualitative interviews was informed by the literature review of the study domains, by the results of the quantitative study, and by emerging themes in the dataset.

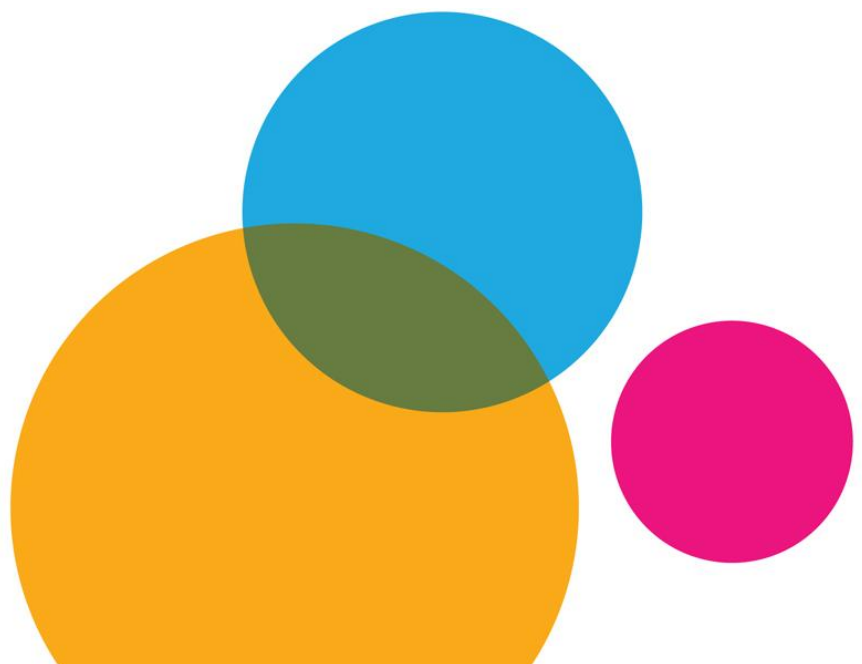
A combination of inductive and deductive coding was used. The coding structures were based on the topics covered by the interview schedules, which map onto the domains of the study. The questions asked of the participants were framed by the ecological perspective of child development and the hypotheses derived from the literature about what influences children's lives and the course of their development. Each interview was analysed by topic; thematic analysis entailed the examination of data to identify patterns in respondents' behaviours or responses, which were coded as emerging themes.

Throughout the data analysis process, the research team has endeavoured to be reflexive and to critically examine the strengths and weaknesses of the data which will inform the next wave of the quantitative study, with the children at 13 years of age, and the subsequent qualitative study. Each member of the research team has been encouraged to examine their interpretive biases and reactions to the data.



# Chapter 6

## THE DATA FILE





## 6.1 THE STRUCTURE OF THE DATA FILE

Data generated from the child and parent interviews included audio files, transcripts, field notes and visual data such as photographs and worksheets. The archived data include anonymised versions of the full interview transcripts and the visual data, that is, the photographs, worksheets and drawings generated by the children that do not contain identifying information.

## 6.2 NUMERIC CODES

A unique archive code has been attached to the data generated by each family. The same code is used for data generated by the child or the parents in each family. It is possible to obtain a code cross-reference file to link the qualitative data, which has been lodged in the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA), with the quantitative data archive housed in the Irish Social Science Data Archive (ISSDA).

## 6.3 PREPARATION OF THE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS FOR THE DATA ARCHIVE

To prepare the data for the archive, a number of variables in the qualitative dataset have been anonymised to ensure that an individual respondent or family cannot be identified from the qualitative data. The study team has followed the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA) anonymisation protocols, which are included in Appendix 3. The general approach to the anonymisation of the data, in line with the IQDA anonymisation protocols, means that:

- All major identifying data were removed, including names, places, companies and occupational details, ages, time points, identifiable incidents, medical conditions and other disorders and disabilities, and positions in social and sports organisations. These data were replaced with pseudonyms where appropriate or with descriptions that reflect the function of the original text in the context of the transcript.
- As recommended by IQDA, the NUTS 3 regional divisions have been used to replace specific geographical locations such as villages, towns and counties (Appendix 4).
- The study team has followed the IQDA guidelines regarding highly sensitive information. For example, sensitive data which might expose participants to legal action or place them at risk of harm, scandal or ridicule have been removed.
- There were a small number of cases which, even after the removal of these data, could still have been identifiable, so these cases are not included in the archived dataset.

## 6.4 PREPARATION OF THE VISUAL DATA FOR THE DATA ARCHIVE

The visual data generated by the children have also been anonymised. Potentially identifying material, such as the photograph on the “Passport” or a cousin’s name, was obscured. The following categories of anonymised visual data generated by the children have been digitalised and are available in the data archive:

- “My Passport” worksheet
- The Children’s Body Image Scale
- “My Hand” worksheet
- Feeling Cards (1-5)
- The Life Ladder
- Wishes and Fears list
- Activities Calendar
- “When I am 13” worksheet
- “Who is in my family” worksheet
- “My Family & Me” worksheet



Magic Wand worksheet  
“My Letter to the Minister for Children”  
Drawings

## **6.5 RESEARCH FIELD NOTES**

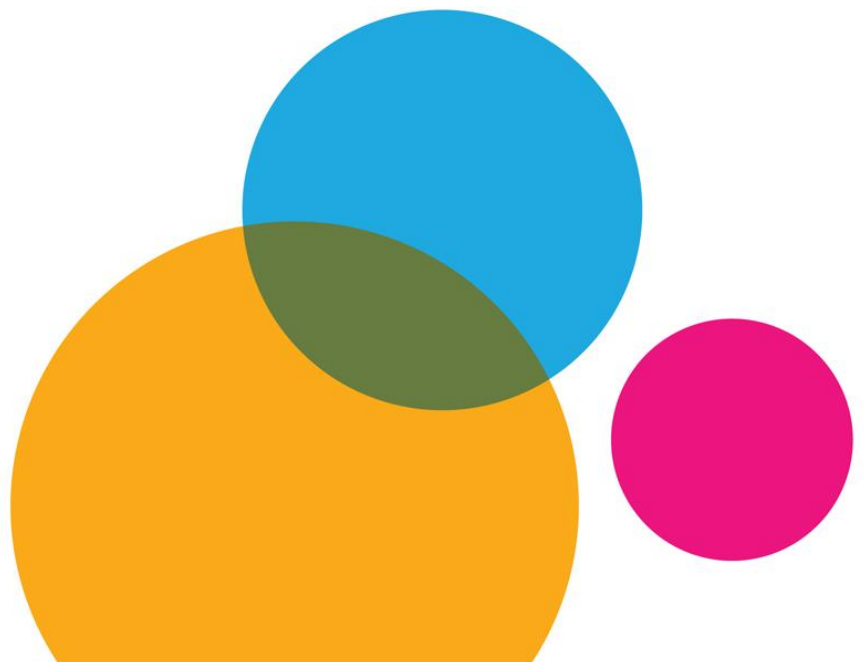
All field notes relating to the interviews have been anonymised and any sensitive information removed, following the same IQDA anonymisation protocols used in the transcripts, in order to be placed in the archive.





# Chapter 7

## SUMMARY





## 7.1 SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to describe in detail the design and methodology of the qualitative study of the Child Cohort of ***Growing Up in Ireland***. The focus is on the child-centred methods, reflecting advances in qualitative methodology for children's research. The qualitative study complements the quantitative study in developing a databank on children in Ireland.

The broad aim of the ***Growing up in Ireland*** study is to examine factors which contribute to or undermine the well-being of children in contemporary families in Ireland. The output from the study is expected to contribute to the formulation of effective policies and design of valuable services which address issues pertinent to the lives of children and their families. The study is closely aligned to the National Children's Strategy, of which one of the principal aims is that children's lives will be better understood, and will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs and rights and on the effectiveness of services.

The sample design for the qualitative study was stratified for socio-demographic profiles which informed the case studies. As detailed in section 1, the protocols for the qualitative study were developed in consultation with a panel of experts in qualitative and children's research as well as with the Children's Advisory Forum.

Interviews were conducted with 122 children and their parents in their homes. The interview schedules covered each of the domains of ***Growing Up in Ireland*** while the open-ended questions and child-centred activities ensured that participants could raise other issues during the interviews. The methods of analysis had the flexibility to illustrate both what is typical in the experience of nine-year-olds and the unanticipated interests or concerns that children expressed.

The data from the qualitative study are archived with the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA). ***Growing Up in Ireland*** is a legacy project that will provide a detailed picture of the lives of children and families in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, the archived data, giving the holistic and individual descriptions that qualitative studies provide of the lives of the participants and their views on matters of importance to them, are an invaluable resource for social science and social history researchers.



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