

# Growing Up in Ireland

National Longitudinal Study of Children

## INFANT COHORT

Technical Report on the Qualitative Data from the Infant Cohort at  
Nine Months of Age



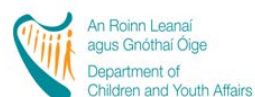
# Growing Up in Ireland

National Longitudinal Study of Children

## TECHNICAL REPORT ON THE QUALITATIVE DATA FROM THE INFANT COHORT AT NINE MONTHS OF AGE

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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders or of either of the two institutions involved in preparing the report.





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# Chapter 1

## OVERVIEW OF THE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS





## 1.1 BACKGROUND

**Growing Up in Ireland** was commissioned in April 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 study is being carried out by a consortium of researchers led by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD).

**Growing Up in Ireland** focuses on a broad range of child outcomes across three domains:

- Physical health and development
- Social, emotional and behavioural well-being
- Educational achievement, intellectual capacity and cognitive development<sup>1</sup>

The main aim of the study is to describe the status of two representative samples of children in Ireland and how they are developing in the current social, economic and cultural environment. The study follows the progress of two cohorts of children: a group of 8,500 older children who (with their families and carers) were recruited at nine years of age and a group of 11,100 younger children who (with their families and carers) were recruited at nine months of age. The information recorded in the study will be used to assist in policy formation and in the provision of services aimed at ensuring that all children have the best possible start in life. The study incorporates a mixed methods perspective, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches, to gain a holistic understanding of childhood in 21<sup>st</sup> century Ireland.

This paper focuses on the technical aspects of the qualitative research with the Infant Cohort at nine months of age. Fieldwork was conducted between January and May 2009, with a sample of 122 families.

**Growing Up in Ireland** can be set within the National Children's Strategy (Department of Health and Children, 2000), the primary objective of which is to "... enhance the status and further improve the quality of life of Ireland's children" (p.4). It affirms Ireland's commitment to respecting children as fully participating members of society in their own right. The three main goals of the National Children's Strategy are to:

- Improve children's lives through increased understanding
- Promote children's development by providing quality supports and services
- Give children an appropriate voice in matters which affect them.

The principles espoused by the National Children's Strategy are an integral part of **Growing Up in Ireland** and ensure that in its conception and planning it is a study *of* children, *with* children and *for* children. The study encompasses all children in Ireland – in all their multifaceted variation and diversity.

## 1.2 AIMS OF THE STUDY

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

1. Describe the lives of children in Ireland, to establish what is typical and normal as well as what is atypical and problematic
2. Chart the development of children over time, to examine the progress and well-being of children at critical periods from birth to adulthood
3. Identify the key factors that, independently of others, most help or hinder children's development
4. Establish the effects of early childhood experiences on later life
5. Map dimensions of variation in children's lives
6. Identify the persistent adverse affects that lead to social disadvantage and exclusion, educational difficulties, ill-health and deprivation
7. Obtain children's views and opinions on their lives to inform policy making
8. Provide a bank of data on the whole child

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the project, see Greene et al. (2010).



9. 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.<sup>2</sup> 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).

### 1.3 METHODOLOGY

The sample used in the qualitative survey was made up of 122 families selected from the 11,100 families who participated in the quantitative study. It was selected with reference to the socio-demographic characteristics of the achieved sample in the main quantitative survey, and stratified according to income status, gender, urban/rural location and family type. The sample is clearly very large by the standards typically associated with qualitative surveys. Nonetheless, with only 122 families it cannot purport to be wholly representative of the population of nine-month-old infants resident in Ireland at that time. In its socio-demographic structure and profile, however, it is very much in line with the sample in the main quantitative study. Sample design and profile are discussed in more detail in Section 2 of this report. The qualitative interviews with infants' parents complement the findings of the quantitative study by exploring further the same key domains. These interviews centre on the following themes: capturing insight into the parents' perceptions of their baby; baby's routines and habits; parent and child relationship; the transition to parenthood; parents' perceptions of parental and self-efficacy; decision-making and support; engagement with community and neighbourhood; parental feelings about their work/life balance; childcare, and current and future aspirations for their baby.

The selection of methods used in the qualitative part of the study was informed by the literature and guided by an advisory panel of experts in qualitative research. The Research Advisory Panel contributed to the development of the interview schedules and provided advice on the proposed assessment and observation tools. The qualitative protocols are outlined in Section 3 of this report.

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<sup>2</sup> See Greene *et al* (2010) for a consideration of the background and conceptual framework underlying the project: [http://www.growingup.ie/fileadmin/user\\_upload/documents/Technical\\_Reports/GUI\\_Background\\_and\\_Conceptual\\_Framework.pdf](http://www.growingup.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Technical_Reports/GUI_Background_and_Conceptual_Framework.pdf)



# Chapter 2

## SAMPLE DESIGN







## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The parents of 127 nine- to 11-month-old infants (including five sets of twins) participated in the interviews. This section describes how the sample for the qualitative part of the study was selected, and considers 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 inclusion in the pool of households for possible selection into the qualitative sample. Approximately 72 per cent (8,043) of the families forming the Infant Cohort (11,100 in total) gave their consent to be put forward. Of these families, 216 were selected as being broadly representative of the main infant sample and invited to participate in the qualitative interviews. An introductory letter, information leaflet and consent form with prepaid envelope were sent to each of the families (copies are included in Appendix A). The mail shot was then followed up with a phone call to each family from a member of the research team.

## 2.3 RESPONSE RATE

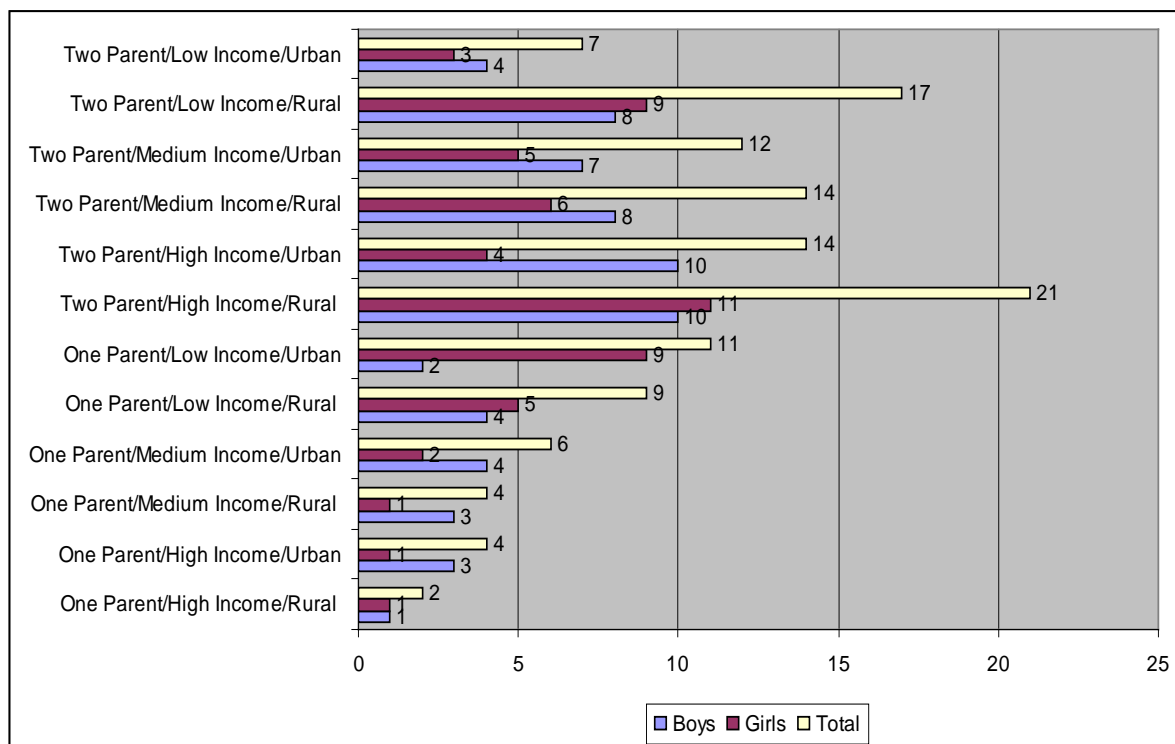
As there was a tight window available for carrying out fieldwork (when the child was in his/her 11<sup>th</sup> month), initial oversampling was undertaken to provide a buffer of families who could not be contacted by phone or who would not be available to participate within the required timeline. In each of the four months of fieldwork, an extra 10 (on average) letters were issued by post but were not followed up with the phone contact when it became apparent that the monthly quota of 30 would be met. In gross terms (all households included) the response rate was 59 per cent. When the 'above quota' households are excluded, the response rate was 73 per cent. A total of 122 families from the nine-month cohort participated in the qualitative study. Five sets of twins participated in the study, bringing the total number of infant assessments to 127.

## 2.4 SAMPLE PROFILE

The qualitative sample was stratified with reference to the characteristics of the main sample completed in the quantitative part of the study. It was selected from families who had completed the questionnaire survey and consented to being included in the pool of respondents for potential selection into the qualitative study. It was selected with regard to income status (high, middle and low equivalised income groups); urban/rural location, and family type (one- or two-parent families). The gender breakdown of the sample was very much in line with the national figures for nine-month-olds: 62 (49 per cent) of infants in the sample were girls. The children were aged between nine and 11 months at time of interview.



**Figure 1: Qualitative sample classified across socio-economic status, rural/urban location, family type and gender**



The qualitative sample had good national coverage, containing infants from 25 of the 26 counties in Ireland. Table 1 compares the regional distribution of the qualitative sample with the overall population of nine-month-old infants, by broad region.

**Table 1: Comparison of regional distribution of nine-month-olds in the national population with those in the population sample**

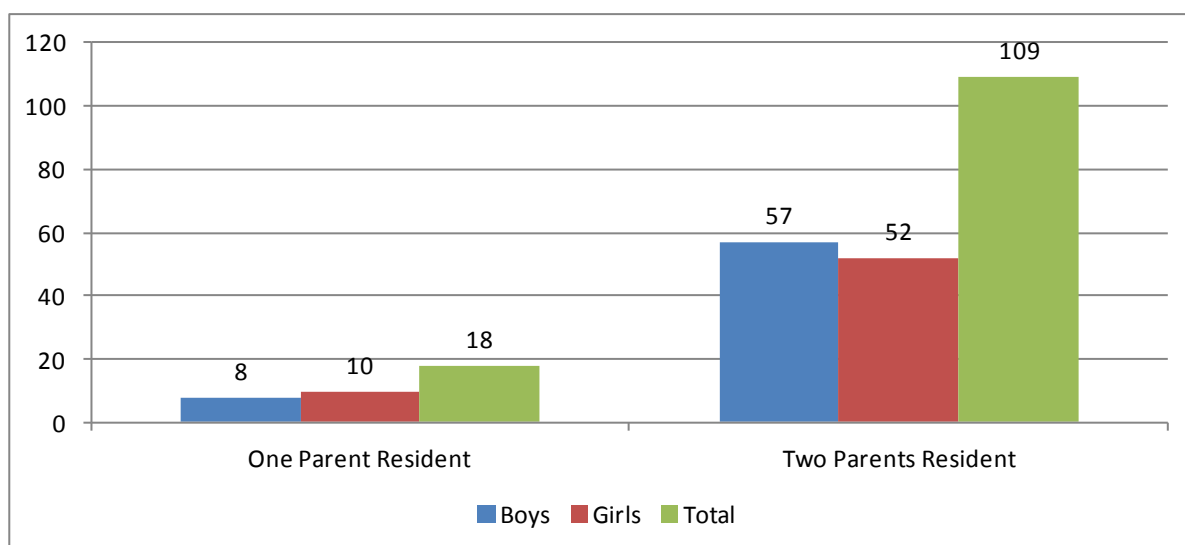
Region	Population %	Qualitative sample %
Border	11.3	12.4
Dublin	26.6	27.3
Mid-East	13.2	8.3
Midland	6.2	12.5
Mid-West	8.3	8.9
South-East	10.9	13.3
South-West	13.9	9.1
West	9.4	8.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Notwithstanding the relatively small size of the sample, the table indicates that its regional breakdown was largely in line with the national population of infants in the age range.

Infants from one- and two-parent families were included in the sample. As shown in Figure 2, 18 of the 127 children (14 per cent) were growing up in one-parent families and the remaining 86 per cent in two-parent families.

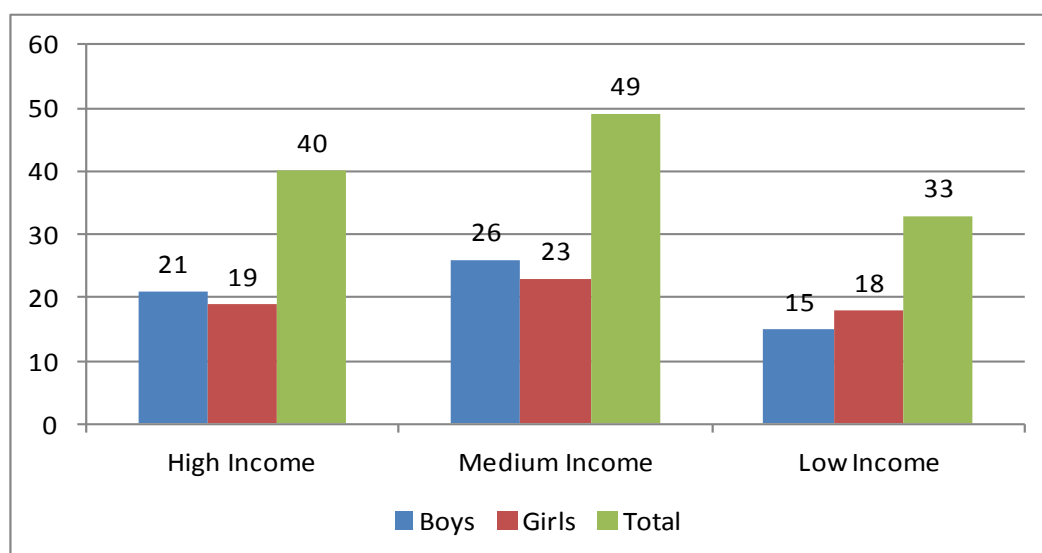


**Figure 2: Qualitative sample classified across family structure and gender**



Annual income was recorded in the quantitative study. Based on the number of adults and children in the household and total net annual household income, an equivalised income figure was calculated. Equivalised income allows a comparison of living standards between households which vary in terms of their size and composition (different numbers of adults and children). On the basis of equivalised household income, families were assigned to three categories: Low Income (up to €13,757.83); Middle Income (between €13,757.84 and €20,494.95) and High Income (€20,494.96 or more).

**Figure 3: Qualitative sample classified across income**



As shown in Figure 3, 40 of the families<sup>3</sup> (26 per cent) were in the high income group; 49 (40 per cent) in the middle income group and 33 (27 per cent) in the low income group. Of the 122 families interviewed, the majority (79 per cent) were from Irish backgrounds, the remainder coming from white non-Irish, African or Asian backgrounds.

<sup>3</sup> Families, not children.



# Chapter 3

## DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION





### 3.1 DESIGN OF THE QUALITATIVE STUDY

This section describes the design of the qualitative study and the methods used to explore the key domains with the Infant Cohort. A lengthy preparatory stage preceded the choice of research methods to ensure that the most appropriate approaches 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,<sup>4</sup> and the pre-pilot and pilot testing and refinement of methods. The research design was subject to approval by *Growing Up in Ireland's* Research Ethics Committee. Ethical approval was obtained for both pilot and main qualitative fieldwork.

### 3.2 DOMAINS OF THE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW

The areas explored in the qualitative interviews map onto the domains of the main quantitative study to provide a deeper understanding of parents' experiences of their parenting role. The main themes explored were:

1. Perception of the Baby
2. Baby's Routine and Habits
3. Parent and Child Relationship
4. Service Utilisation
5. Transition to Parenthood
6. Perception of Being a Parent
7. Decision-making and Social Support
8. Community and Neighbourhood
9. Work/Life Balance
10. Childcare
11. Current and Future Concerns and Aspirations for Baby

### 3.3 INSTRUMENTS

The overall schedule developed for the qualitative study consisted of five main components:

- the Baby Profile Page
- the Bayley Scales of Infant and Toddler Development
- a semi-structured interview with the infant's parents
- the HOME Infant / Toddler (IT) Inventory
- Infant Photographs: recognition of emotional states

#### 3.3.1 THE BABY PROFILE PAGE

The Baby Profile Page was used to open the interview with the parents about their infant and record details on the infant's personality and favourite things. A one-page document, titled the Baby Profile Page, was completed by the parents.<sup>5</sup> This page allowed the parents to record contextual information about important activities in the child's life at their current age. A Polaroid photo of the baby was taken, with parental consent, and text completed on the baby's personality, favourite toy, favourite food and favourite place.

#### 3.3.2. THE BAYLEY SCALES OF INFANT AND TODDLER ASSESSMENT

A developmental assessment was carried out in the infant's home using the Bayley Scales of Infant and Toddler Development (Bayley, 2005). The Bayley is a standardised assessment tool, used widely in research on child development. The assessment combines cognitive, language and motor scales, and can be used for infants aged from one to 42 months.

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<sup>4</sup> See Greene and Harris (2011) *Qualitative Research Methodology: A review of the current literature and its application to the qualitative component of **Growing Up in Ireland***.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A.



The Bayley Scales of Infant Development were administered in the following sequence: Cognitive Scale, Language Scale (Receptive and Expressive), Communication and Motor Scale (Fine Motor and Gross Motor). On average the assessment took approximately 45 minutes to complete.

The Cognitive Scale assesses sensorimotor development, exploration and manipulation, object relatedness, concept formation, and memory. The Language Scale comprises two parts: the Receptive and Expressive Communication Sub-Tests. For the 9-12 month age group, the Receptive Sub-Test assesses pre-verbal behaviours and vocabulary development, such as being able to identify objects and pictures. This was followed by the Expressive Communication Sub-Test which assesses pre-verbal communication such as babbling, gesturing and turn-taking.

Finally, the Motor Scale was administered. This comprises the Fine and Gross Motor Sub-Tests. The first assesses infants' skills related to tracking, reaching, object manipulation and grasping. The second, the Gross Motor Sub-Test, primarily measures the movement of the limbs and torso; static position (e.g. sitting and standing); dynamic movement, including locomotion and coordination; balance and motor planning.

### 3.3.3 THE PARENT INTERVIEW

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed to interview the parents. Both parents were interviewed in 66 families (54.5 per cent), the Study Child's mother only in 35 families (28.4 per cent), and the Study Child's mother in person and father by phone in 21 families (17.1 per cent). The researchers followed an interview guide consisting of specific questions addressing the domains to be explored, with probing questions used (where appropriate) to explore responses in more depth. An overview of the main themes explored in the interview with the parents is provided below.

1. *Perception and Relationship with Baby:* How do parents view their infant's personality and temperament? What are their feelings towards their infant? How has the infant settled into family life?
2. *Infant's Health and Functioning:* What are parents' views about their infant's health, routine and feeding habits?
3. *Service Utilisation:* What was the parent's experience of ante and post-natal services? What was their experience of labour and delivery? What supports does the family receive from the State?
4. *Transition to Parenthood:* What adjustments have been made since the birth of the infant? What impact has the birth of the Study Child had on the parents' relationship? How do they deal with stress?
5. *Perception of Being a Parent:* What is their role as the infant's parents? How confident are they as parents? Do they enjoy being parents? What influences their parenting? How does the infant's temperament or behaviour affect their parenting?
6. *Decision-making and Social Support:* Who makes the decisions concerning the household or bringing up the Study Infant? Where or to whom do they turn for advice?
7. *Childcare and Work/Life Balance:* How do the parents feel about being at home with their infant or returning to work? What type of childcare, if any, does the family use? How has the infant settled into childcare? What would the ideal childcare situation be for the family?
8. *Community and Neighbourhood:* How does the family get involved with the community? Are there any concerns about the local environment?
9. *Current and Future Concerns:* Do the parents have any concerns about the infant's future health and development? What are the plans for childcare? Are there any future plans for the infant starting playschool or school?

The logic of the order of themes was considered with a view to easing the parents into the interview. Potentially sensitive areas were placed later in the interview for when the parents felt more relaxed and had become comfortable talking to the researcher.



To maximise participation by fathers in the study, an option of a 10-minute telephone interview was offered in circumstances in which fathers were not available at the time of the home visit. The telephone interview schedule was based on six key themes from the interview schedule:<sup>6</sup>

1. Parent and Child Relationship
2. Transition to Parenthood
3. Perception of Being a Parent
4. Decision-making and Social Support
5. Work/Life Balance
6. Current and Future Concerns and Aspirations for Baby

### 3.3.4 THE HOME INFANT / TODDLER (IT) INVENTORY

During the early years, home and family constitute the most important environment for most children. The Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME; Caldwell & Bradley, 1984) was selected as it gives a view of the infant's behaviour and development via first-hand experience of the infant's home environment. It is designed to provide a systematic measurement of the developing infant's family environment, using a sensitive combination of enquiry and observation.

The HOME was used during the interview to measure the quality and quantity of stimulation and support available to the child in the home environment. This inventory is designed for use during infancy (birth to age three) and is composed of 45 items clustered into six sub-scales which assess the quality of the infant's home environment. To aid the flow of the interview, sections of the HOME were completed as the issues arose during the conversation. The domains were as follows:

1. *Parental Responsivity*: describes the extent to which the parent responds to the child's behaviour, via verbal, tactile and emotional reinforcement of desired behaviour and communicating freely through words and actions
2. *Acceptance of Child*: assesses parental acceptance of less than optimal behaviour from the infant and avoidance of undue restriction and punishment
3. *Organisation of the Environment*: measures the extent to which there is regularity and predictability in the family's schedule, the safety of the physical environment, and use of community services as part of the family support system
4. *Learning Materials*: this sub-scale records the provision of appropriate play and learning materials capable of stimulating development
5. *Parental Involvement*: measures the extent to which the parent is actively involved in the child's learning, and provides stimulation for increasingly mature behaviour
6. *Variety in Experience*: describes the inclusion in daily life of people and events that bring some variety (without disorganisation) to the infant's life

The items were coded as to whether they are based on Observation (O), Interview (I) or Either (E). The interviewer completes the summary sheet and a total score is obtained by placing a plus (+) or minus (-) in the box alongside each item on the record form. Sub-totals are entered later in the summary sheet to give a total score.

### 3.3.5 INFANT PHOTOGRAPHS: RECOGNITION OF INFANT EMOTIONAL STATES

After the interview schedule was completed, the Primary Caregiver was shown 14 photographs of infants displaying different emotional states and asked to name how the infant was feeling in each photograph and how the parent would respond to this infant (adapted from Kropp & Haynes, 1987). This task took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Each of the photographs was presented to the Primary Caregiver in the following order.

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix A.



Photo 1:	Joy
Photo 2:	Distress or pain
Photo 3:	Interest
Photo 4:	Sadness
Photo 5:	Interest
Photo 6:	Anger
Photo 7:	Anger
Photo 8:	Sadness
Photo 9:	Surprise
Photo 10:	Distress or pain
Photo 11:	Fear
Photo 12:	Surprise
Photo 13:	Fear
Photo 14:	Joy

The deep and enduring bond between children and their parents provides the early foundation for a child's sense of security and is seen as a key contributor to socio-emotional growth and development in the infant to toddler period (Berk, 2005).

Research has shown that if parents are perceptive and attentive to emotional signals, the infant can often elicit an appropriate response from the parents (Izard, 1978). The ability to differentiate between and be responsive to infant emotional signals is an important factor in facilitating positive parent-child interaction patterns. Parents who misread emotion signals are likely to respond inappropriately to the infant.







# Chapter 4

## DATA COLLECTION



#### 4.1 FIELDWORK

The qualitative data were collected by four researchers between January and April 2009. Each of the researchers had experience in researching the views of children and families, and all were vetted by An Garda Síochána (the Irish police). Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, the Study Team provided training to each of the researchers in the ethics of carrying out research with children and handling and responding to sensitive issues that might arise during the interviews. The Study Team also commissioned a specialist to provide further training to the researchers in child protection procedures, following the National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (DOHC, 1999) and ethical guidelines (Whyte, 2006). Researchers were fully trained in the aims of the *Growing Up in Ireland* study, and in interviewing techniques and instruments. The manual provided to fieldworkers is included in Appendix B.

#### 4.2 ADMINISTERING THE INTERVIEW

Before interviewing began the Study Team secured informed consent from the infant's parents. The family's right to withdraw from the study at any stage was respected. The direct assessment and interview with the parents took place in the infant'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 the Baby Profile Page.

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





# Chapter 5

## DATA ANALYSIS



## 5.1 DATA MANAGEMENT

Each of the parent interviews was fully transcribed by the research team. The full transcriptions, field notes, observations and materials generated during the interviews formed the dataset for analysis.

## 5.2 ANALYSIS

The principal aims of the qualitative study were to document the complexity and diversity of the lives of children and their families and to address policy-relevant questions that cannot be fully addressed with the larger quantitative 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 that complement 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 themes emerging from the data. The interview topics are listed in Section 3.3.3 above.



# Chapter 6

## THE DATA FILE





## 6.1 STRUCTURE OF THE DATA FILE

Transcripts of the parents' interviews have been lodged in the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA). These were anonymised prior to deposit. In anonymising the data the Study Team followed the anonymisation protocols recommended by IQDA. This meant that a number of general procedures were implemented as follows:

- All major identifying data were removed including names, places, companies, occupational details, ages, time points, identifiable incidents, medical conditions and other disorders and disabilities, as well as 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 were used to replace specific geographical locations such as villages, towns and counties.
- The Study Team followed the guidelines outlined by IQDA regarding highly sensitive information. For example, highly sensitive data which might expose participants to legal action or place them at risk of harm, scandal or ridicule were removed.

Three cases could not be deposited in the archive as it was felt that, even after the implementation of the anonymisation procedures, the transcripts from the families in question could still have made them identifiable. To ensure that the guarantees of confidentiality given to the families were respected the cases in question were not included in the dataset deposited in the archive.

## 6.2 ACCESSING THE DATA

To access the infant qualitative data, users should log onto <http://www.iqda.ie/content/growing-ireland> where a data access form must be completed and a legal agreement signed with the IQDA.

To access the data the following steps should be completed:

- Download the IQDA Data Access Request Form and Agreement on Conditions of Use
- Read and complete the IQDA Data Access Request Form; be sure to indicate the dataset(s) to which access is requested
- Read and complete the IQDA Agreement on Conditions of Use
- Return both completed forms to IQDA home page

IQDA c/o NIRSA,  
IONTAS Building,  
National University of Ireland Maynooth,  
Maynooth,  
Co. Kildare,  
Ireland



# Chapter 7

## SUMMARY





The purpose of this report was to describe the design and methodology of the qualitative study of the Infant Cohort of ***Growing Up in Ireland***. The focus was on the child-centred methods used in this part of the project, reflecting advances in qualitative methodology for children's research. The qualitative study complements the quantitative study in developing a databank on a subsample of infants in Ireland.

The broad aim of the ***Growing Up in Ireland*** study is to examine factors that contribute to or undermine the well-being of children in families in contemporary Ireland. The output from the qualitative study will contribute to the formation of effective policies and design of services that address issues related to the lives of children and their families. The study is closely aligned to the National Children's Strategy, one of the principal aims of which 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 provided for them and their families

The families in the qualitative study were broadly representative of the sample used in the main quantitative survey. As detailed in Section 3, the protocols for the qualitative study were developed in consultation with a panel of experts in qualitative and children's research.

Interviews were conducted with the infants' families in their homes. The interview schedule covered each of the domains of ***Growing Up in Ireland*** while the open-ended questions and child-centred data collection ensured that participants could raise other issues during the interviews.

The parent interviews 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 their families in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The archived qualitative data will give holistic and individual descriptions of the lives of the participants and their views on matters of importance.





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