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THE CHANGING SOCIAL WORLDS OF 9-YEAR-OLDS

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ESRI ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
EU	European Union
GUI	*Growing Up in Ireland*
HBSC	Health Behaviour of School-Aged Children
SEN	Special Educational Needs
TUSLA	Child and Family Agency
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This report compared the experiences of 9-year-olds born a decade apart by drawing on Wave 1 of the *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI) Cohort '98, conducted in 2007/08, and Wave 5 of GUI Cohort '08, conducted in 2017/18. It documents changes in their lives across the domains of relationships with family and peers, day-to-day activities and engagement with formal and informal learning. The analyses draw on survey data as well as time-use diaries completed by the children and their families, providing rich insights into their lives against a backdrop of rapid societal transformation. The decade between the two waves, 2007/08 to 2017/18, saw significant economic and social change as well as important policy developments. However, to date little has been known about how these changes have impacted on the lives of children.

This study looks not only at overall change in the experiences of 9-year-olds but also examines whether any changes are due to the shifting profile of their families over time (in particular, rising educational levels among parents). It also explores whether gender and social background differences have increased or diminished over time. The main research questions addressed in the study are:

- How have the quality of relationships, experience of learning and activities engaged in by 9-year-olds changed over the course of a decade?
- Are any differences found due to changes in child, family and social background characteristics?
- Are any such changes more evident for boys or girls or for children from different social backgrounds (in terms of parental education, social class, income and financial strain)? In other words, is differentiation by gender and social background in children's social worlds less evident for the younger cohort than previously?

The remainder of this executive summary outlines the main findings of the study and the implications for policy development.

CHANGES IN THE PROFILE OF CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

There were significant social and economic changes experienced by children in both cohorts. Important policy changes took place in parental leave, early years provision and the promotion of literacy and numeracy skill development over this period. Cohort '08 were born on the cusp of the Great Recession while the country was only starting to move into recession when 9-year-olds from Cohort '98 were surveyed. Thus, Cohort '08 experienced difficult economic circumstances during

early childhood before later economic recovery by age nine. Associated austerity measures led to reduced expenditure on public services and declining living standards, and experience of financial strain was more common among the families of Cohort '08 than among Cohort '98. Over the decade examined, Ireland became a more linguistically and culturally diverse society, with the proportion of children with migrant parents increasing from 8 per cent to 11 per cent between cohorts. Continuing growth in educational participation meant a marked increase in the proportion of graduate parents, from 26 per cent for Cohort '98 to 39 per cent for Cohort '08. Children in the younger cohort were also less likely to be brought up in larger families.

One of the most noticeable changes was the increase in the proportion of mothers who reported that their child had a long-standing illness or disability, from 11 per cent for Cohort '98 to 24 per cent for Cohort '08. A similar increase was evident in the proportion said to be hampered by that condition – from 5 per cent to 13 per cent. Changes in the questions asked and classifications used make it difficult to untangle which kinds of conditions have increased over time and the potential role of increased awareness in reporting these conditions. Further research using GUI data could usefully unpack changes over time in the composition of this group.

The analyses presented in the report explore the extent to which changes in children's lives over the decade are driven by these changes in child and family characteristics.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS AND PEERS

Both mothers and fathers in the two cohorts characterised their relationships with their 9-year-old children as relatively close and low in conflict. Both closeness and conflict were related to gender and social background, with families experiencing financial strain and parents of boys reporting less closeness and higher conflict. Over the decade between the two waves of data collection, parent-reported closeness increased but mother-child conflict also increased. The negative effect of financial strain on the quality of parent-child relations has weakened somewhat over time. Contrasting views are reported by the children themselves; the majority report being 'very close' to their mothers and fathers, but the proportion doing so was lower for Cohort '08 than for Cohort '98. Gender differences are evident, with girls reporting feeling closer to both mothers and fathers than boys. The frequency of eating dinner together is used as a proxy for time together. This declines between cohorts, with a greater decrease found among more advantaged groups.

Nine-year-old children typically have two or three close friends, though the number with larger friendship networks (six or more) increases between cohorts. Children from migrant backgrounds and those with disabilities tend to have fewer

friends. Experience of financial strain and living in rented accommodation are also associated with having smaller friendship networks. Nine-year-olds most often do something with their friends outside school on two or three days a week, though around a quarter see them almost every day. Less advantaged and urban children see their friends more often. The proportion seeing their friends almost every day declines somewhat between cohorts, but this trend is due to changes in the profile of families.

DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES

Survey and time-use-diary data are used to look at the amount of time 9-year-olds engage in general play, take part in sports and spend on screentime. Time on general play remains stable between the two cohorts and is more prevalent among girls and those from more highly educated families, but also those experiencing financial strain. Sports participation declines over time as does frequent engagement in hard and light exercise. There is some widening of the gap by parental education, social class and income, with more frequent involvement in sports among children from advantaged families. Regular participation in sports is highly gendered, with this gender gap remaining stable over time.

Changes in the wording of survey questions to reflect broader societal changes make it challenging to compare screentime over time, though the time-use data help to bridge this gap. A significant increase in mobile phone ownership is found among 9-year-olds; girls and those with more disadvantaged families were more likely to be 'early adopters' in Cohort '98 but the gap by social background reduced over time. There is a very significant shift in the amount of time spent watching television towards time on other devices but time-use diary data show little overall change in screentime. However, these data do not capture screentime as a secondary activity (for example, playing games on a phone while travelling to school) which international research suggests accounts for the main increase over time (see, for example, Goode et al., 2020).

FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Nine-year-olds in both cohorts are broadly positive about school, with the vast majority always or sometimes liking it. There is an increase over time in the proportion who report always liking school. Girls are more positive about school than boys but interestingly children from more disadvantaged families are more likely to report always liking school, though this difference reduces somewhat over time. Attitudes to reading become somewhat more positive over time, though this is due to changes in the profile of families. There is little change over time by gender or social background in attitudes to reading. In contrast, overall attitudes to Maths do not change over time but there is evidence of a widening of the gender

gap (in favour of boys) and a widening of the difference by parental education (in favour of those with higher levels of education).

The most typical pattern is for 9-year-olds to report reading for pleasure a few times a week, with under a third reading every day. Frequent reading is much more common among girls and those from more advantaged families. The gender gap narrows slightly over time but differences by background become more pronounced as frequent reading declines for all except those with graduate parents. There is a slight decline in the proportion engaging in structured cultural activities (such as music or drama lessons) (from 47 per cent to 44 per cent) but this decline is greater if we look at changes within educational levels. The gender difference in cultural participation in favour of girls is large and remains stable over time. There is a slight reduction in the variation by parental education over time but the difference remains large.

Analyses indicate there is some 'trade-off' between screentime and other activities, with those spending more time watching TV and using computers less likely to engage in sports, reading for pleasure and cultural pursuits. Owning a mobile phone is associated with less time reading and lower levels of involvement in cultural activities. Much of the decline in reading is related to screentime and mobile phone ownership but the differences found between cohorts in sports and cultural participation are evident even when taking screentime into account.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings have significant implications for policy across a number of domains, including support for families, sports and leisure policy, and education policy. Financial strain emerges as a factor in reduced closeness and increased conflict between parents and children, highlighting the importance of anti-poverty policies in conjunction with family support policies. Gender differences in parent-child relations from both parent and child perspectives merit further investigation and the patterns found suggest the need for family support policies to directly address potential gender stereotyping in interaction patterns.

There are concerning trends regarding involvement in sports, cultural activities and reading for pleasure. The findings also point to a remarkable persistence over time in gender and social background differences in children's activities and experiences, and there is evidence of growing social inequality in some domains such as sports and reading. Schools are an important arena for providing boys and girls from different social backgrounds with exposure to a variety of activities, though previous research has pointed to variation by school size and gender mix in the provision of after-school activities (Nolan and Smyth, 2020; Smyth, 2016; 2020). Gender and social background differences in children's activities emerge

early (Smyth, 2016), suggesting the importance of early years provision in challenging gender stereotyping and providing access to a variety of engaging activities. There is a case for subsidised provision of sports and cultural activities for more disadvantaged groups, given the paid-for nature of much current provision. Ongoing revision of the primary curriculum offers the potential to address gender and social background differences in attitudes to Maths, though continuous professional development will be important in implementing curricular change. Continued efforts on the part of schools (and community-based facilities such as libraries) will be important in trying to reverse the decline in reading for pleasure found among many groups of children.

This report documents quite significant changes in the day-to-day lives of 9-year-olds even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Soon-to-be available data on Cohort '08 at 13 years of age offer the potential to examine both the influence of broader social change and the experience of the pandemic on the lives of young people.

CHAPTER 1
Introduction

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Recent decades have seen marked changes in the lives of children and their families. Ireland has become a culturally and linguistically more diverse society, higher education participation rates have continued to rise, digital technology has penetrated all aspects of day-to-day lives and economic changes have led to ups and downs in the living standards and wellbeing of families. Policy changes have significantly impacted on the lives of families, including the extension of leave arrangements for working parents and the introduction (and later extension) of subsidised early education for young children. To date, however, there has been a lack of information on how these changes have been reflected in children's experiences and outcomes. The two-cohort nature of the *Growing Up in Ireland* study provides a unique opportunity to examine the lives of 9-year-olds, using surveys conducted a decade apart (2007/08 and 2017/18). This report contrasts the two cohorts across different domains of their lives, including relationships with parents and peers, day-to-day activities (including screentime) and experience of formal and informal learning. In doing so, it examines whether any changes found reflect the shifting profile of 9-year-olds and their families.

The main research questions addressed in the study are:

- How have the quality of relationships, experience of learning and activities engaged in by 9-year-olds changed over the course of a decade?
- Are any differences found due to changes in child, family and social background characteristics?
- Are any such changes more evident for boys or girls or for children from different social backgrounds (in terms of maternal education, social class, income and financial strain)? In other words, is differentiation by gender and social background in children's social worlds less evident for the younger cohort than previously?

The remainder of this chapter places the study in the context of policy changes and previous research on changes in children's lives and then goes on to document the methodology and measures used in the analyses.

1.2 CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY

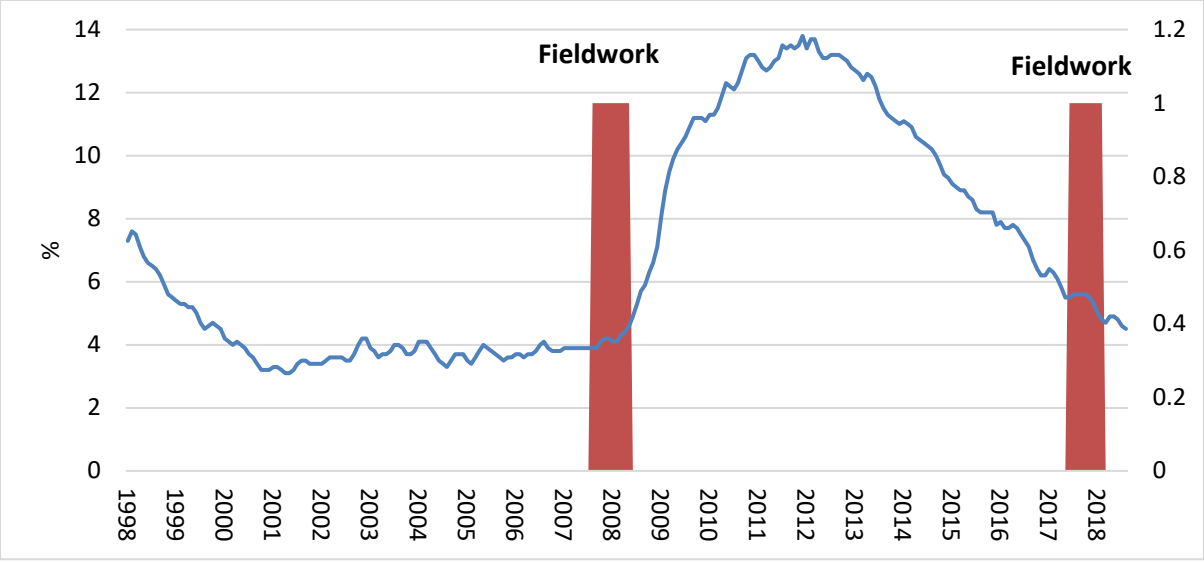
Before relating this study to previous research on children's changing lives, it is worth considering two aspects of the context: the policy and societal changes that

took place over the decade 2007/08 to 2017/18 and the developmental stage of these 9-year-old children.

1.2.1 The economic and policy context

The very significant economic changes that took place between the birth of Cohort '98 in 1997/98 and the fieldwork with Cohort '08 at nine years of age in 2017/18 form an important backdrop for policy developments over this period. Both cohorts experienced periods of economic growth and recession but at different points in their development. Figure 1.1 shows the timing of the fieldwork with 9-year-olds (shaded areas) against the backdrop of trends in adult unemployment rates over time. The children of Cohort '98 were born in a period of relatively high unemployment but the economic situation had improved by the time they reached the age of nine. In contrast, Cohort '08 were born on the cusp of the Great Recession, with unemployment reaching a high when they were around five years of age and a subsequent improvement in economic circumstances by the time they were nine. By this stage (2017/18), unemployment was down to a level only slightly higher than was the case for Cohort '98 at nine. Thus, children from Cohort '08 experienced difficult economic circumstances during early childhood while this happened in adolescence for Cohort '98 (and therefore after the period considered in this study). These labour market dynamics were reflected in the employment patterns of the parents of the cohort children, though fathers' employment rates remained stable (being 91 per cent for Cohort '98 and 92 per cent for Cohort '08 9-year-olds) while there was a growth over time in maternal employment rates (from 54 per cent to 64 per cent).

FIGURE 1.1 SEASONALLY-ADJUSTED UNEMPLOYMENT RATES FOR ADULTS AGED 25-74, HIGHLIGHTING THE TIMING OF GUI FIELDWORK WITH 9-YEAR-OLDS



Source: Seasonally-adjusted unemployment figures, www.cso.ie.

The Great Recession had very significant impacts on the lives of families through its effect on economic wellbeing and on the policy context. Largescale job losses resulted in a reduction in income for many families and a large increase in material deprivation (an inability to afford basic items), which disproportionately impacted on families with children (Regan and Maître, 2020). Austerity measures introduced in the wake of the banking crisis also eroded living standards, with a reduction in the level of social welfare payments and pay reductions for those working in the public sector. Cuts in public expenditure in key sectors such as education and health would also have impacted on the early and middle childhood experiences of Cohort '08. Later social welfare changes would have started to impact on the situation of Cohort '08. From 2012 to 2015, the child qualifying age for lone-parent payments was reduced to seven years, leading to an increase in employment rates (Redmond et al., 2022). Thus, some of the families of Cohort '08 would have been exposed to this change in policy, at least for a short period of time.

Important changes took place in parental leave, early years provision and primary education over this period. Parental leave, entitling fathers and mothers to 14 weeks of unpaid leave for each child (before they were eight), was first introduced in Ireland in 1998. Thus, parents in both cohorts would have been able to avail of this leave. Parental leave was subsequently increased to 18 weeks in 2013, which would have affected families in Cohort '08 but not Cohort '98 (unless they had subsequent children). Both cohorts were born prior to the introduction of legal entitlement to paid paternity leave (in 2016) and to paid parent's leave (introduced in 2019). The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme first enrolled children for a free year-long programme in January 2010, so the children from Cohort '08 would have been among the first tranche to take part in the programme. However, they would have completed ECCE before its later expansion to a two-year programme.

At primary education level, the 2011 National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy led to an increased focus on supporting children's development in these key domains and the introduction of standardised testing at second, fourth and sixth class levels. This would have formed an important context for the primary school experiences of children in Cohort '08. The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme was launched in 2005 to provide an integrated suite of supports to schools serving a concentration of socio-economic disadvantage. While this report does not directly assess the impact of attending a DEIS school, potential changes in inequality in educational outcomes must be seen against this backdrop.

1.2.2 The developmental context

This study focuses on changes over time in experiences in middle childhood. Middle childhood is generally considered as spanning the time from six to 11 years of age and is a period of important skill development, including gross and fine

motor skills (Oswalt, 2010), and more complex reasoning and problem-solving competences (DelGiudice, 2018). Children's receptive and expressive language skills also become more advanced at this stage (Murray et al., 2020a). They become better able to regulate their own behaviour (Best et al., 2009) and to engage in moral reasoning as well as taking the perspectives of others (Jambon and Smetana, 2014). Relationships with parents continue to be very important but children's social worlds expand, as they begin to spend more time with their peers and in organised activities such as sports (McHale et al., 2003). Gender-typing in the kinds of play and other leisure activities in which children engage also become more acute at this stage (Moller et al., 1992), with friendship groups tending to be same-sex in nature (McHale et al., 2003). Middle childhood is an important time for the child's emerging self-concept (Erikson, 1959) and comparison with others may affect child wellbeing via their self-esteem (Oswalt, 2010). In order to capture key aspects of development in middle childhood, this study looks at family and peer relationships, activities and learning experiences (see Section 1.4).

1.3 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON CHILDREN'S CHANGING LIVES

Work conducted from the sociology of childhood perspective has documented the changing position of children within families over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, especially the growing recognition of children's own agency and right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives (see, for example, Corsaro, 2015; James, 2009; Greene and Nixon, 2020). Commentators have indicated also the greater involvement of children in more structured activities in their out-of-school lives and the involvement of at least some groups of parents in 'concerted cultivation', promoting the kinds of activities that seek to enhance the cognitive and social development of children (Lareau, 2011; Craig et al., 2014). This shift has been accompanied by a reduction in outdoor play and less independence among children (Clements, 2004).

A long-term perspective on changes in children's lives has been limited by the lack of availability of comparable empirical studies. However, since the latter part of the twentieth century, researchers have increasingly drawn on repeated cross-sectional and longitudinal cohort studies, particularly studies incorporating time-use data, to analyse changes in the activities of children and adolescents.

Much of this research has focused on trends in health outcomes among children and young people (see, for example, Bann et al., 2018; Nuffield Foundation, 2021). However, there is an emerging body of work on children's relationships and activities. Mullan (2019) used time-use data on 8-16-year-olds in the UK between 1974/75 and 2014/15 to document changes in their activities (see also Mullan, 2020). He found increased time spent at home, increased screentime and time on homework with decreased time in unstructured play. He also found an increase in

time on sport. The analysis indicated a persistence in the gendered nature of children's lives over time. There has been much less research on differences in activities by migrant status. However, in Australia, Chen (2022) reports that children (aged 4-9) from immigrant families (especially those from non-English-speaking countries) spent more time reading and less time in non-structured leisure and social activities than those from native families. The time spent on different activities has been found to vary across countries, with, for example, adolescent screentime being higher in the UK and Finland than in Spain (Gracia et al., 2020). Screentime levels are also higher in the UK than in the US, largely reflecting greater access to broadband and smaller family size in the UK (Mullan and Hofferth, 2022). The size of the gender gap in time on certain activities (such as screentime) also varies across contexts (Gracia et al., 2022).

Not surprisingly, much of the discussion of children's lives has focused on increased digitalisation, with children being viewed as 'digital natives' (see Bennett et al., 2008 on this debate). Using Health Behaviour of School-Aged Children (HBSC) data for 2002 to 2010 across 30 countries, Bucksch et al. (2016) found a slight decrease in TV viewing, more than offset by an increase in computer use for gaming and non-gaming purposes across all countries, with the pattern more accentuated for boys than girls. However, detailed time-use data have revealed a more nuanced picture. Looking at adolescents in the United States over the period 2002/03 to 2014/16, Fomby et al. (2021) found that time spent on technology increased but only as a secondary rather than a primary activity (for example, using a tablet while being driven to school). Time spent watching television decreased while overall digital engagement became more diverse in nature. Using the same data but focusing on the middle childhood experience (6-11-year-olds), Goode et al. (2020) reported a 23 per cent increase in technology time, again mainly as a secondary activity and usually in the context of travel. Technology time appeared to displace physical activity, especially among younger children. Using UK data, Mullan (2018) found that increases in screentime among 8-18-year-olds between 2000 and 2015 were mainly related to increased videogaming among boys. For girls, the growth was in the use of digital devices while engaging in other activities.

There have been few studies of changes over time in parent-child relationships (Jiménez-Iglesias et al., 2017). One study using HBSC data on 11-15-year-olds over the period 2001 to 2010 found improved communication between adolescents and their parents in most countries, as reported by the young people (Brooks et al., 2015). Another study based on Spanish HBSC data for the period 2002 to 2010 showed statistically significant but small increases in child-reported maternal and paternal affection and in communication with parents (Jiménez-Iglesias et al., 2017).

Researchers in Ireland have similarly depicted significant changes in family life over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Gray et al. (2016), drawing on life-history interviews, document a shift towards more democratic forms of parenting, with parents placing greater value on children's independence and imagination than previously. Devine (2008) has indicated the influence of global discourse on children's rights in the Irish context but highlights adult-child power relations as mediating its effect on children's day-to-day lives. Family formation processes have been increasingly delayed over time and there have also been changes in the prevalence of lone-parent families (Lunn et al., 2010). The absence, until recently, of systematic data on children and young people has limited the extent to which research has been able to document the implications for children's lives of these broader social changes. Using repeated waves of the Health Behaviour of School-Aged Children (HBSC) study over the period 1998 to 2014, Keane et al. (2017) have documented an increase in the proportion of 10-17-year-olds who find their parents easy to talk to but a decrease in the proportion who are living with both of their parents. Spending time with friends was found to be relatively stable over time as was engagement in vigorous exercise four or more times a week. Taking advantage of the two *Growing Up in Ireland* cohorts, Bohnert and Gracia (2021) examined changes in screentime, showing a reduction in time spent watching television and an increase in the time on, and diversity of, digital screentime between cohorts.[1] They document, on average, poorer socioemotional wellbeing among nine-year-old children who spend longer watching TV or using other devices.

This study aims to exploit the potential of the two-cohort nature of GUI to document changes in the lives of 9-year-old children across a range of domains over the period 2007/08 to 2017/18. In doing so, it fills a gap in Irish research on how broader social change has impacted on children's perspectives and activities. Previous international research has tended to focus on describing overall trends rather than unpacking the extent to which any changes reflect a shift in the profile of children and their families. This study explicitly looks at whether any changes are evident net of increases in parental educational attainment and inward migration, among other factors. Furthermore, much previous research has focused on adolescents, though experiences during middle childhood have been found to be predictive of later outcomes (Smyth, 2017). The following section discusses in greater detail the approach taken to analysing change over time and the measures used to understand children's experiences.

[1] It should be noted that the measure of digital screentime used for Cohort '98 relates to time on the computer, but time spent playing videogames was not included in the authors' analysis.

1.4 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

1.4.1 Data

This report draws on Wave 1 of GUI Cohort '98, conducted in 2007/08, and Wave 5 of GUI Cohort '08, conducted in 2017/18, to compare the experiences of 9-year-olds born a decade apart. The two waves have much in common, including the coverage of key domains of the child's life, the collection of information from the Primary Caregiver (hereafter, the mother),[2] the Secondary Caregiver (hereafter, the father) and the child themselves, and the use of many comparable measures and scales to enhance cross-cohort comparability (discussed in more detail below). However, the waves differ in important dimensions that must be considered in comparing the two sets of data.

First, the timing of the sampling in the child's life-course differed, being carried out at 9 months old for Cohort '08 and 9 years old for Cohort '98. Thus, 9-year-olds from Cohort '98 include children who immigrated to Ireland since the age of 9 months whereas these children are not captured in Cohort '08. The analyses therefore take into account where the child was born (among other factors) in comparing cohorts.

Second, the sampling frame used was different, reflecting the age of the children. Cohort '08 was sampled from the Child Benefit Register, with a stratified sample selected from all children born between 1 December 2007 and 30 June 2008 (Thornton et al., 2013). In contrast, Cohort '98 was sampled within primary schools, with a two-stage selection process involving schools and then 9-year-olds (Murray et al., 2010). For Cohort '98, 82 per cent of the sampled primary schools took part and 57 per cent of the families sampled participated in the study (Murray et al., 2010). In contrast to Cohort '98, information on 9-year-olds in Cohort '08 was subject to attrition between the first and fifth waves of the study (Murray et al., 2020b). Using information on participation across waves, it can be calculated that 53 per cent of all families approached when the child was 9 months old took part in the wave at 9 years of age. This is somewhat lower than the response rate for 9-year-olds in Cohort '98 but it must be noted that this latter figure cannot take account of non-response at the school level. In this report, weighting is used for descriptive and multivariate analyses to take account of differential patterns of non-response and attrition in the two cohorts. Further, the inclusion of variables (such as maternal education and financial strain) that are associated with non-response/attrition in the models will further ensure that we are comparing like with like. The analyses presented in the report are based on (unweighted) 8,568 cases from Cohort '98 and 8,032 cases from Cohort '08.

[2] For both cohorts, 98 per cent of Primary Caregivers were female.

In addition to the interviews with children and their parents, 9-year-olds were asked to complete a time-use diary[3] covering a specific day, indicating activities (from a specified list) for each 15-minute slot over the 24-hour period. The activities listed and approach taken (i.e. paper self-completion) were similar across both waves. Both cohorts spanned all calendar months in completing the diary, with the largest concentration in August to November. Completion rates for the diary were somewhat higher for Cohort '98, with 73 per of Cohort '98 completing the diary (to a usable level) compared with 58 per cent for Cohort '08 (Quail and Williams, 2013; Quail and Ryan, 2022). Separate weights were constructed for the time-use data and are used in the analyses presented.[4] The use of weights, along with the inclusion of key variables associated with non-response and attrition, should ensure that the between-cohort analyses are comparable. An important difference between the two waves was the treatment of simultaneous activities (e.g. watching TV and playing). For Cohort '98, up to five activities were coded if recorded by the respondent but no specific instruction was offered on the value of doing so (Quail and Williams, 2013). For Cohort '08, participants were encouraged to record just one activity for each time slot, but up to three activities could potentially be recorded concurrently. Overall, 28 per cent of Cohort '98 9-year-olds reported multiple activities while this was the case for 46 per cent of Cohort '08 9-year-olds. For comparability, the composite measures used here confine Cohort '98 to three activities. The analyses in this report are based on the 5,049 cases for Cohort '98 and 4,283 cases for Cohort '08 who fully completed the time-use diaries and control for weekday/weekend and term-time/holiday to take account of variation in the timing of diary completion.

The analyses presented in this report mainly draw on the survey data from the child and mother, but time-use data are used where information from the survey is not comparable over time or does not cover specific activities (see Section 1.4.3). The reasons for this strategy are twofold. First, the response rates for the diaries are lower than for the main survey, especially for Cohort '08. Therefore, it is better to use the information from the larger sample where possible. Second, some of the categories in the time-use diaries, especially sports/exercise, changed between cohorts so are not fully comparable.

1.4.2 Methodology

Descriptive analyses are presented in this report. However, simply comparing the frequency of an experience or activity between Cohort '98 and Cohort '08 is likely to give a misleading picture of change over time. In particular, there have been notable changes in the profile of 9-year-olds (discussed in detail in Chapter 2). Children from Cohort '08 are more likely to have parents with a degree, because

3 In practice, parents frequently assisted the child in completing the time-use diary.

4 Only the Anonymised Microdata File (AMF) version of the time-use data (rather than the more detailed Researcher Microdata File (RMF)) was available at the time of writing.

of continuing expansion of educational participation and, given previous research, this is likely to have implications for their engagement with learning and their out-of-school activities (Toth et al., 2020; Smyth, 2016). However, the expected increase in cultural participation resulting from this trend may be partially offset by higher levels of financial strain in Cohort '08, which may reduce participation in paid-for cultural or sports activities. Parents in Cohort '08 are more culturally and linguistically diverse than is the case for Cohort '98; given patterns for minority groups in Cohort '98, this may contribute to differences in the size of friendship groups and reduced participation in structured activities over time (Coughlan et al., 2014; Darmody and Smyth, 2017).

Multivariate models are used to analyse children's experiences and outcomes, directly comparing differences across cohorts. These models control for factors linked to compositional change, including maternal education, family structure and size, and migrant background (see below for a description of these measures). They also control for gender, urban/rural location, disability/special educational needs (SEN), financial strain and housing tenure. The focus is on assessing:

- Overall change over the decade;
- The extent to which gender differences have reduced or increased across different domains (using interaction terms between gender and cohort);
- The extent to which social inequality (by maternal education, social class financial strain and income) has reduced or increased over time across these domains (using interaction terms between the different dimensions of social background and cohort).

These analyses will therefore provide important insights into whether inequality by social background and gender is increasing or decreasing over time as a basis for policy development. It would, in theory, be possible to look at whether the influence of other background factors had changed over time. However, there are difficulties in directly comparing migrant groups across cohorts as they differ markedly in nationality of origin and language background, among other factors. Similarly, changes in the measurement of disability/SEN along with broader shifts in identification and resourcing mean that the cohorts cannot be compared in a straightforward fashion here.

1.4.3 Measures used

1.4.3.1 Outcomes

The measures used were selected to capture key domains of the child's life, including their relationships with parents and peers, their day-to-day activities and their engagement in formal learning (school experiences) and informal learning

(such as reading and taking part in cultural activities). A further consideration related to the comparability of measures across cohorts.

The quality of the parent-child relationship was assessed from both the parent and child perspective. The closeness/positive and conflict subscales of the Pianta (1992) Child-Parent Relationship Scale were administered to both parents (where resident). The positive subscale captured getting on with the child and feelings of effectiveness as a parent (e.g. 'I share an affectionate warm relationship with my child'). The conflicts subscale captured difficulties in the relationship (e.g. 'My child sees me as a source of punishment and criticism'). Measurement differed across the cohorts, with the longer 30-item scale used with Cohort '98 and the short-form 15-item scale used with Cohort '08. For comparability, analyses in this report are based on the same 15 items for both waves. At the age of nine years, children in both cohorts were asked about how well they got on with their mothers and fathers, with response categories 'very well', 'fairly well' and 'you don't get on'.[5] Because of small numbers in the latter category (which therefore cannot be reported separately), those who report getting on 'very well' with each parent are contrasted against all others in the analyses presented here.

The number of days when the family eat dinner together (as reported by the mother) is used as a proxy for time spent together. Because of the high frequency of eating together, those who eat together every day are contrasted against all others in the analyses presented.

At age nine, mothers (but not children themselves) were asked about the size of the child's friendship network. Both the number of close friends and the frequency with which the child sees their friends outside school hours are analysed here.

Engagement in sports/physical exercise was based on the child's report of how many days per week they were involved. In order to capture less structured forms of leisure not asked about in the main survey, the time spent by the child on 'general play' (with toys, dolls, cars etc; dressing up, 'playing house', imaginary or make-believe games) was derived from the time-use diary data.

Because the nature of digital engagement had changed over the decade concerned, more detailed information on screentime was collected from Cohort '08 children and parents. A further methodological challenge was created by the categories for screentime in Cohort '98 being quite clustered, with '1-3 hours' treated as one response category. For this reason, both survey and time-use

[5] In contrast to the parent-reported measure, children could rate their relationship with non-resident parents.

data are used to disentangle changes in (types of) screentime. Mother survey reports of time spent watching television, videos or DVDs are used to look at the profile of those who spend longer on this activity. In addition, the time spent watching television and on a digital device (including messaging) are analysed using the time-use data, with a composite measure of total screentime also constructed. Mothers in both waves were also asked whether the 9-year-old had their own mobile phone.

Experiences of formal learning were based on the child's report of whether they 'always', 'sometimes' or 'never' liked school, reading and Maths. Informal learning was captured by the frequency with which the child reported reading for fun and the mother's report of whether the child took part in structured cultural activities (such as music and drama lessons/clubs).

1.4.3.2 Explanatory variables

In order to compare like-with-like across cohorts, a number of child and family characteristics were taken into account. At the child level, analyses took account of gender and whether the child had a long-standing illness or disability as reported by their mother. The wording differed slightly between the two waves. In Cohort '98, mothers were asked whether the child has 'any on-going chronic physical or mental health problem, illness or disability' while in Cohort '08, they were asked whether the child has 'any longstanding illness, condition or disability … by longstanding, I mean anything that has troubled him/her over a period of time or that is likely to affect him/her over a period of time'. It is not self-evident that the term 'longstanding' would be taken as including a larger group of children than 'on-going'. Unfortunately, changes in the classification of illnesses/disabilities in follow-up questions are not comparable across waves so cannot be used to unpack the drivers of inter-wave differences.

A multidimensional approach to exploring inequalities in child experiences and outcomes has been adopted. Parental education was based on the highest level of education of the mother or father, grouped into four categories ranging from 'lower secondary (Junior Certificate) or less' to 'degree or higher'. Social class was based on the occupational group of parents, using a similar dominance approach with the highest parental class assigned to the household as a whole; the 'non-employed' group is treated as a class category to capture the experiences of children living in jobless households. Because of relatively small group sizes, semi-skilled and unskilled manual groups are combined in the analyses presented here. Financial strain is based on whether the mother reports the household experiencing 'great difficulty' or 'difficulty' making ends meet. Household tenure is also used as a measure of social background, distinguishing between those in

rental accommodation (from a private landlord or a local authority/housing body)[6] and all others. Sensitivity analyses also take account of household income, equivalised for household size and composition and divided into quintiles (fifths). A separate 'income missing' category has been created to retain cases in the analyses.

In addition to these social background characteristics, the analyses take account of whether the household is a lone-parent family and whether the family is living in an urban or rural area. Migrant families are defined as those where both parents were born outside Ireland or (in the case of lone-parent families) where that parent was born outside Ireland. The analyses also take account of whether the child was born in Ireland.

1.5 OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

Chapter 2 looks at the extent of change in the profile of children and their families over the decade between the two survey waves. Chapter 3 compares the quality of parent-child relationships and day-to-day family contact among Cohort '98 and Cohort '08. Chapter 4 looks at the size of friendship networks, the extent of contact with friends and engagement in a range of activities, including sports/physical exercise, general play and screentime. Chapter 5 explores children's attitudes to formal learning and their engagement with informal learning in the form of reading for pleasure and structured cultural activities. Chapter 6 summarises the main findings and discusses the implications for policy development.

[6] Information is not available on the receipt of housing support across all waves so those living in the private rented sector but receiving State supports for housing could not be identified in the analyses.

CHAPTER 2
The changing profile of 9-year-olds and their families

2.1 INTRODUCTION

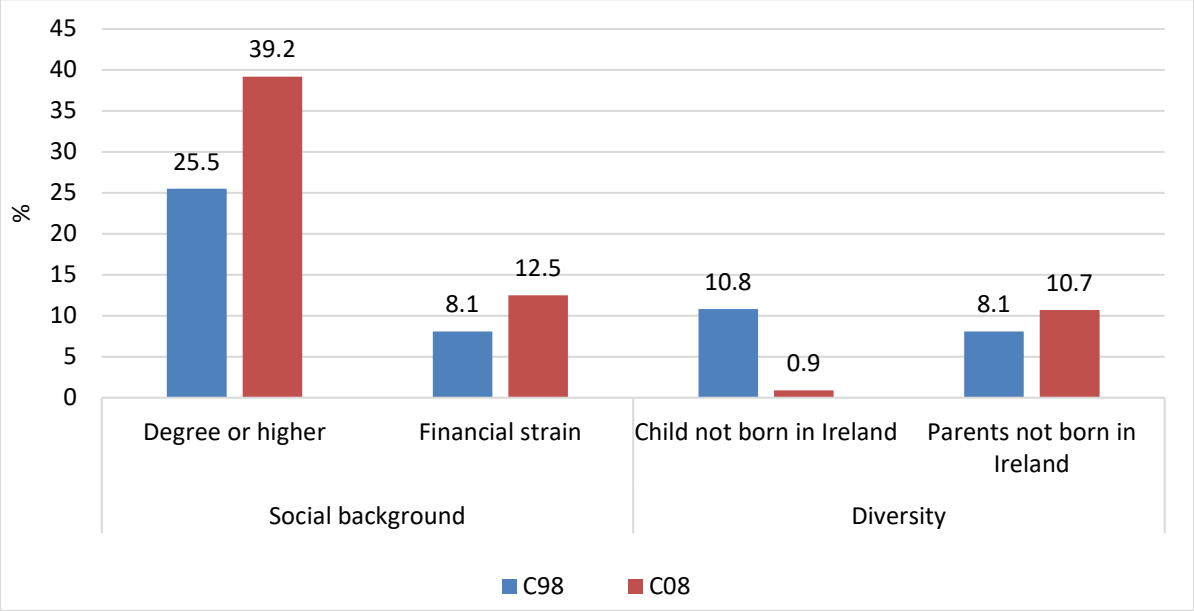
As discussed in Chapter 1, the period covered by the two GUI cohorts (2007/08 to 2017/18) was one of rapid change, encompassing both economic change as Ireland moved from boom to bust and back again and increased diversity resulting from largescale inward migration. It was also a period of significant policy change, with the introduction of funded early years provision and increased support for literacy and numeracy development at primary level, among a raft of other measures, likely to have impacted on the experiences and developmental trajectories of 9-year-olds. This chapter looks at the degree of change between the two cohorts, focusing on the social and cultural backgrounds of their families, the types of families within which they are reared and the extent to which they experience disabilities or special educational needs. This analysis is key to understanding who 9-year-olds are, but also to identifying whether any changes in their experiences and outcomes reflect their changing profile or instead are evidence of broader social change.

2.2 FAMILY SOCIAL BACKGROUND

This section focuses on three aspects of social background: parental education, economic circumstances (proxied by experience of financial strain) and whether the family has a migrant background. Recent decades have seen a very significant expansion in the proportion of the population with degree-level (or higher) qualifications. Comparing qualifications by age group in 2018, 29 per cent of 60-64-year-olds had third-level qualifications compared with 54 per cent of 35-44-year-olds and 56 per cent of 25-34-year-olds (CSO, 2021).[7] This trend was also observed among the GUI cohorts. For Cohort '98, 26 per cent had at least one parent (mother and/or father) with a degree (or postgraduate) qualification, while just ten years later the figure for Cohort '08 was 39 per cent (Figure 2.1). Given the extent to which several aspects of children's lives are influenced by their parents' education levels (see, for example, Williams et al., 2009), we would therefore expect that the frequency of engaging in some activities (such as reading for pleasure and engaging in sport/physical exercise) would increase in tandem with rising educational levels.

7 https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-eda/educationalattainmentthematicreport2021/profileofagesexnationalityandregion/.

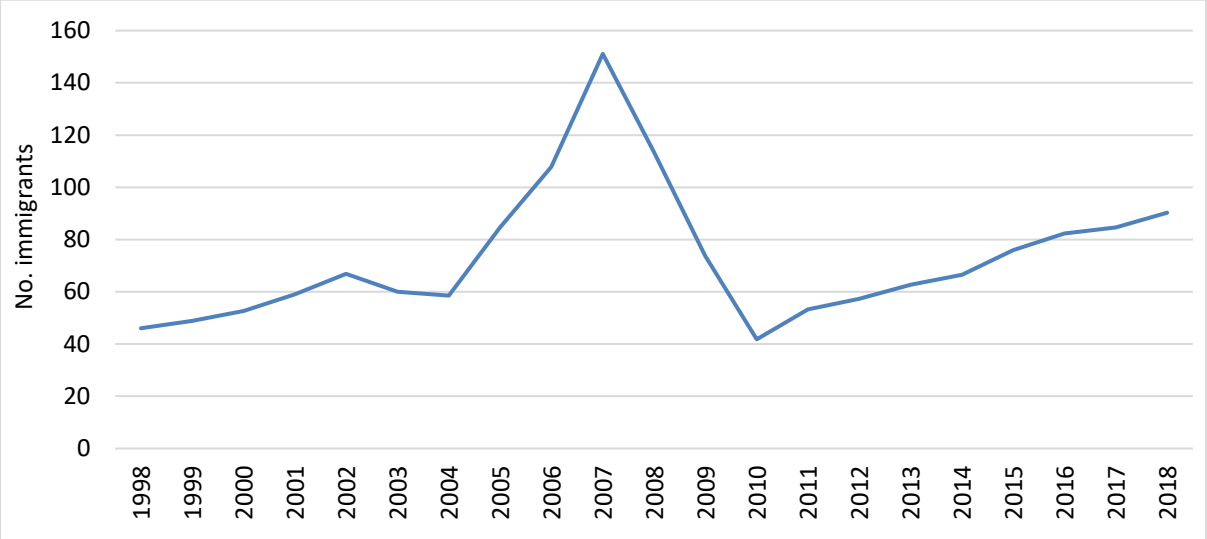
FIGURE 2.1 PARENTAL EDUCATION, EXPERIENCE OF FINANCIAL STRAIN AND MIGRANT BACKGROUND AMONG THE FAMILIES OF 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: Because of the timing of first survey contact at nine months, very few of Cohort '08 were born outside Ireland.

Chapter 1 has highlighted the changing economic circumstances experienced by the two cohorts over the decade analysed. As a result of these trends, higher levels of financial strain are reported among the families of Cohort '08 (13 per cent compared with 8 per cent for Cohort '98) (Figure 2.1).

FIGURE 2.2 TRENDS IN THE NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS TO IRELAND 1998-2018 ('000)



Source: data.cso.ie.

Another significant trend in Irish society has been the growth in the level and nature of inward migration (Figure 2.2). Ireland shifted from a country of net

emigration up to the 1990s towards one characterised by relatively high levels of inward migration, particularly after EU enlargement, though rates have been responsive to economic conditions (McGinnity et al., 2020). The national groups represented among immigrants have also changed over time (McGinnity et al., 2020). Previous research based on Cohort '98 has indicated that 9-year-olds from migrant backgrounds tended to have fewer friends than their Irish peers (Darmody et al., 2016), tended to be less involved in sport (Darmody et al., 2016), were less likely to take part in structured cultural activities and spent more time watching television (Smyth, 2016). In keeping with national patterns, children of Cohort '08 were more likely to have migrant parents than those of Cohort '98 (11 per cent compared with 8 per cent). Eleven per cent of Cohort '98 were themselves born outside Ireland;[8] because Cohort '08 was sampled at nine months old, very few (just under 1 per cent) had been born outside the State. We would therefore expect some changes in the lives of 9-year-olds resulting from their more culturally diverse profile.

In terms of other background characteristics, the proportion of 9-year-olds living in urban areas was relatively stable (declining very slightly from 45 per cent to 43 per cent) while there was a significant increase in the proportion living in social or private rented accommodation (from 21 per cent to 25 per cent), in keeping with national trends regarding housing tenure (Doolan et al., 2022).

2.3 FAMILY TYPE AND CHILD CHARACTERISTICS

This section looks at the type of families into which children from the two cohorts were born, focusing in particular on family structure and family size.

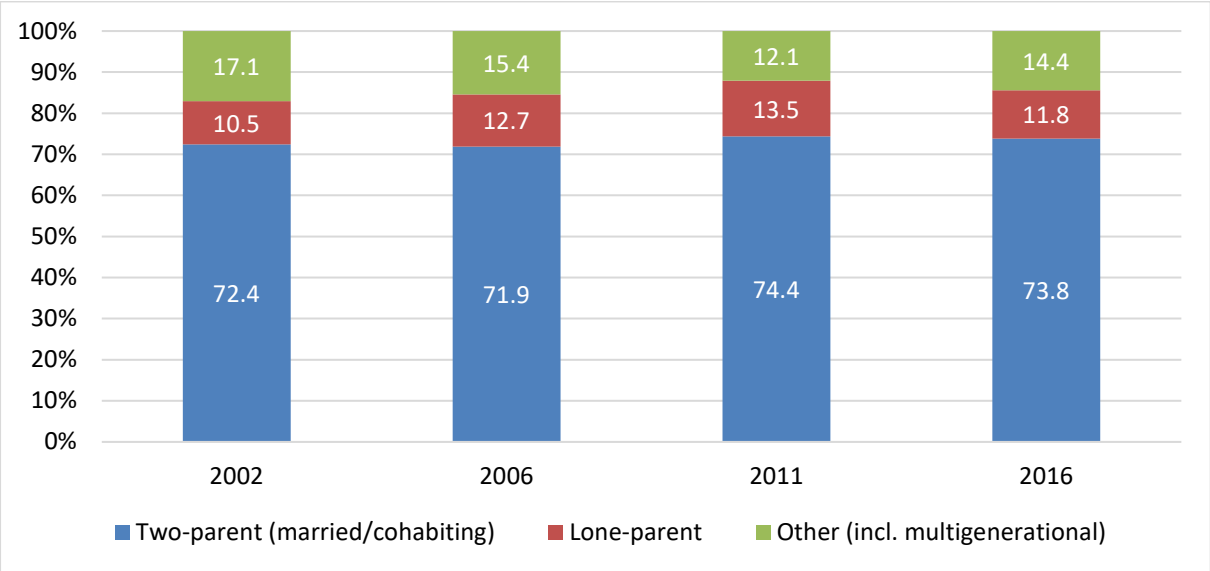
There was an increase nationally in the number of lone-parent families between 1986 and 2006 (Lunn et al., 2010). More recent patterns are far from indicating a consistent increase in the proportion of lone-parent households. Figure 2.3 shows family type over the period 2002 to 2016 (with Census 2022 data not yet available at the time of writing), confining the analyses to households where there is at least one child under 15 years of age. It shows some increase in the proportion of lone-parent households between 2002 and 2011 but a slight drop between 2011 and 2016.

Looking at the GUI figures, there is a slight fall in the proportion of the 9-year-olds living in lone-parent families between the two cohorts (from 18 per cent to 15 per cent) (Figure 2.4). However, it should be noted that two-parent households include both those where the child is living with their (biological) father and mother and

8 It should be noted that this includes children who had been born abroad to parents of Irish origin.

situations where the mother has a new partner. The contrast between the two cohorts is slightly different if fatherhood is factored into the picture. A higher proportion of Cohort '08 were not living with their fathers when they were nine months old compared with Cohort '98 (9 per cent compared with 6 per cent). By nine years of age, the gap had almost closed with 18 per cent of Cohort '08 and 20 per cent of Cohort '98 not living with their fathers.[9] The models that follow control for household structure in general, so we expect changes in household structure over time to account for very little of any shifts in child experiences or outcomes.

FIGURE 2.3 FAMILY TYPE AMONG FAMILIES WITH AT LEAST ONE CHILD UNDER 15, 2002-2016



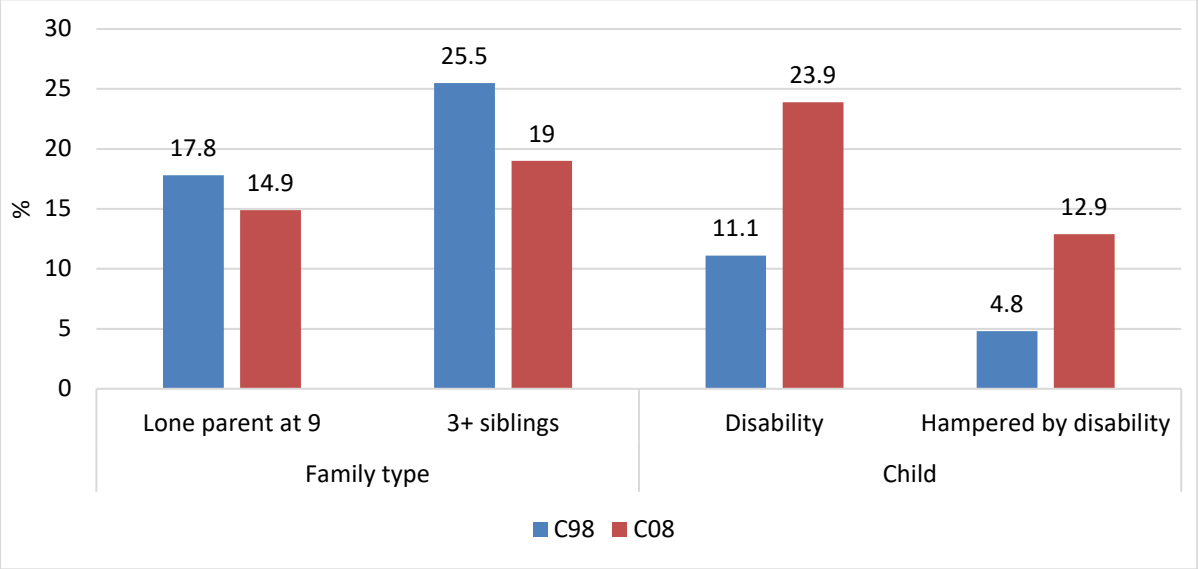
Source: Census figures from IPUMS International Database,[10] Central Statistics Office.

There has been a decline over time in Ireland in the total fertility rate, that is, the average number of children born to a woman; the period 1998 to 2018 saw a further decline from 1.94 to 1.75 (World Bank database). However, Fahey (2014) has pointed to an important distinction between the total fertility rate and number of siblings (sibsize), with the latter being more important from the child's perspective as it reflects the nature of the relationships within which they are embedded. Figure 2.4 shows a decline over time (from 26 per cent to 19 per cent) in the proportion of 9-year-olds in large families, that is, living with three or more siblings. There has been very little previous research in Ireland on the influence of family size on child experiences, so we have no prior expectations as to the effect of these changes in family size.

9 This difference is statistically significant but only at the <.05 level.

10 Minnesota Population Center. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, International: Version 7.3 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020. https://doi.org/10.18128/D020.V7.3.

FIGURE 2.4 FAMILY STRUCTURE AND NUMBER OF SIBLINGS AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.

There has been a very large increase in the proportion of mothers who report their 9-year-old having a long-term or ongoing illness or disability, from 11 per for Cohort '98 to 24 per cent for Cohort '08.[11] The follow-up questions on type of disability were different in the two cohort surveys and used distinct classifications of conditions, reflecting increased awareness of SEN. Using the different classifications employed at the different time points, the most frequently reported conditions among Cohort '98 were respiratory illnesses (5.1 per cent of all 9-year-olds) and mental and behavioural disorders (2.3 per cent). For Cohort '08, the most frequently reported conditions were asthma (9.3 per cent of all 9-year-olds), eczema/skin allergy (3.5 per cent), Autism Spectrum Disorder (2.9 per cent) and respiratory allergy (2.7 per cent). Thus, it is not possible to determine which types of need have increased over time. Increased awareness in schools and wider society may have led to increased identification of conditions. It is not feasible to determine whether this is the case, but comparable information is available on the extent to which mothers feel their children are hampered by the specific illness or condition. The prevalence of being hampered has also increased markedly over time, from 5 per cent for Cohort '98 to 13 per cent for Cohort '08.[12] A number of publications based on Cohort '98 data have indicated lower school engagement, less positive peer relations and more difficulties over the transition to second-level education among those with (some types of) SEN (Banks et al., 2018; McCoy and Banks, 2012; McCoy et al., 2020). We would therefore expect poorer average

11 It should be noted that the figure for Cohort '98 is lower than the estimate for SEN developed by Banks and McCoy (2011) as it is based on mothers' report alone rather than including teacher reports and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire levels.

12 It is, of course, possible that reports of being hampered also reflect greater awareness and identification of need over time.

outcomes in some domains for Cohort ’08 on account of the larger proportion of children with SEN.

2.4 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has shown quite remarkable changes, even over a decade, in the profile of 9-year-olds. Cohort ’08 are more likely than Cohort ’98 to have highly educated parents and to have parents of migrant backgrounds but are less likely to be brought up in larger families. They are much more likely to be reported as having an ongoing illness or disability than the earlier cohort. These factors might be expected to influence child experiences and outcomes in countervailing ways. Increased parental education could be expected to provide children with access to more stimulating activities outside school, including reading for pleasure and engagement in sports/physical exercise (see Lareau, 2011). On the other hand, a more culturally diverse pool of children might mean that some groups of parents have less familiarity with the educational system or availability of out-of-school activities, in turn affecting child experiences. The increased proportion of 9-year-olds with disabilities or special needs also poses a challenge to full inclusion for Cohort ’08. In the chapters that follow, the extent to which changes in the profile of 9-year-olds account for any changes in their experiences and outcomes is explored.

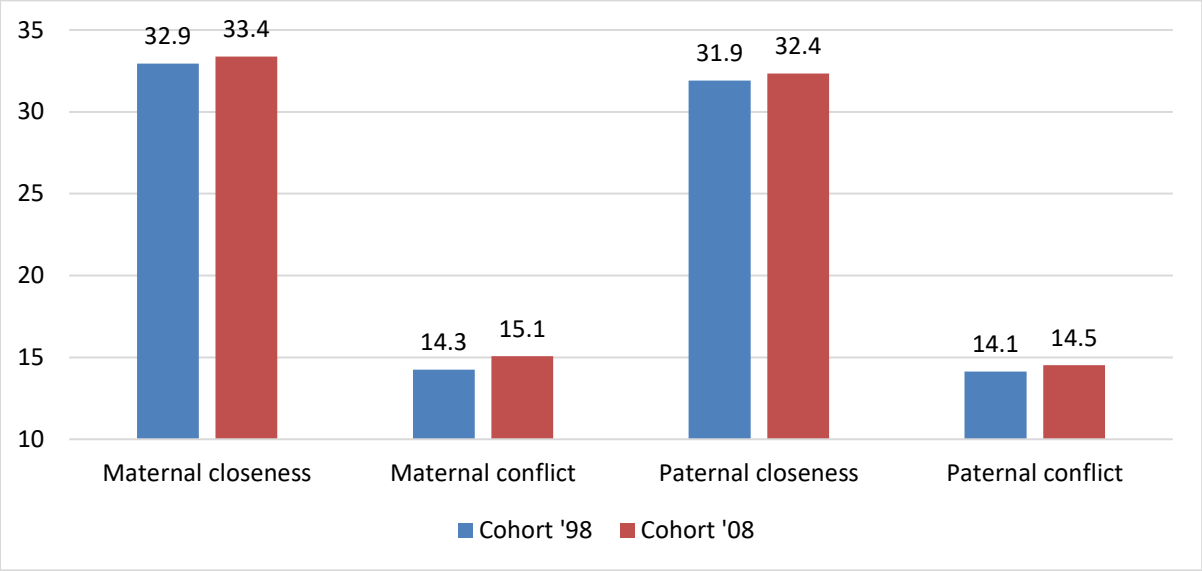
CHAPTER 3
Changes in family relationships

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at potential changes in family relationships from the perspective of parents and the 9-year-olds themselves. It also looks at whether families eat together every day as a proxy for the amount of time spent together. The approach is to present the overall differences between the two cohorts before looking at whether these differences hold when changes in the profile of 9-year-olds and their families are taken into account. The analyses then focus on whether any changes have applied differently to girls and boys and to children from different social backgrounds (in terms of parental education, social class, financial strain and income). Where significant differences are found, model estimates are presented in graphical form to be clearer for the reader.

3.2 PARENTAL CLOSENESS AND CONFLICT

FIGURE 3.1 MOTHER-CHILD AND FATHER-CHILD CLOSENESS AND CONFLICT (PIANTA SUBSCALES) FOR 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.

Both mothers and fathers in the two cohorts were administered the Pianta closeness and conflict scales (Pianta, 1992). The closeness subscale captures how the parent gets on with the child while the conflict subscale captures difficulties in the relationship. For both mothers and fathers, both closeness and conflict increased between Cohorts '98 and '08 (Figure 3.1). These differences were small in scale (around 0.4 points, though larger at 0.8 for maternal conflict) but were statistically significant.

A series of nested regression models were conducted: Model 1 quantifies the raw differences between the two cohorts; Model 2 adds in child and family factors to take account of potential changes in composition over time; Model 3 examines whether trends have differed by gender and parental education; and potential changes by social class and financial strain are explored in Model 4. Appendix tables present sensitivity analyses to explore whether there are changes in the impact of household income over time.

In keeping with the pattern in Figure 3.1, Model 1 in Table 3.1 shows that reported maternal closeness to the 9-year-old was 0.4 points higher for Cohort '08 than for Cohort '98. A difference between cohorts is still evident when family and child factors are taken into account, so this shift does not reflect compositional trends (Model 2). Maternal closeness is higher in relation to girls, children in large families and (slightly) those living in urban areas. Levels of closeness are found to be lower for those from non-employed families or households experiencing financial strain, for those living in rented accommodation and where the child has an illness/ disability. As a benchmark, it is worth noting that the size of the cohort change in mother-child closeness is roughly on a par with the scale of the gender gap.

Models 3 and 4 look at whether gender and social background patterns vary over time by using interaction terms. The gender difference in maternal closeness is found to be stable over time as is variation by social class, parental education and income (see Tables 3.1 and A3.1). However, there is a change in the relationship between financial strain and closeness; it is negatively related to closeness for Cohort '98 but this relationship is no longer evident for Cohort '08. There is no obvious explanation for this shift, but it may reflect some changes in the characteristics of those experiencing financial strain that are not captured in the model. Alternatively, it may be related to changes in the duration of strain.

Mother-child conflict increases between cohorts with only part of that difference related to the changing characteristics of families (Table 3.2). Levels of conflict are lower with daughters and in larger families. They are higher where parents have lower secondary education, are experiencing financial strain, were born outside Ireland, are renting their accommodation and are living in urban areas. Conflict is also much higher where the 9-year-old has a disability/SEN, the largest of the effects found. The shift in mother-reported conflict between cohorts is roughly on a par size-wise with the effect of being a migrant family. Additional analyses (Table A3.1) indicate that conflict is lowest among families in the highest income quintile.

TABLE 3.1 REGRESSION MODELS OF MATERNAL CLOSENESS TO THE 9-YEAR-OLD (PIANTA SCALE)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	32.963	32.954	32.929	32.979
Cohort '08	0.443***	0.536***	0.631***	0.504***
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		0.450***	0.448***	0.446***
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		-0.131+	-0.135+	-0.137*
Post-secondary		0.020	0.031	-0.008
Degree		-0.141+	-0.047	-0.155*
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		-0.174+	-0.167+	-0.030
Managerial		-0.093	-0.086	-0.072
Other non-manual		-0.120	-0.112	-0.180+
Skilled manual		-0.053	-0.048	-0.120
Non-employed		-0.246**	-0.245*	-0.125
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		-0.259***	-0.263***	-0.550***
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		-0.059	-0.057	-0.061
Child born outside Ireland		-0.085	-0.102	-0.086
Lone-parent family		0.117+	0.115+	0.114
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Large family		0.174***	0.170**	0.179***
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		-0.569***	-0.570***	-0.573***
Urban location		0.088*	0.089*	0.092*
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		-0.298***	-0.303***	-0.301***
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			0.009	0.012
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			0.025	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			-0.080	
Degree*Cohort '08			-0.225	
Professional*Cohort '08				-0.241
Managerial*Cohort '08				-0.040
Non-manual*Cohort '08				0.140
Skilled*Cohort '08				0.158
Non-employed*Cohort '08				-0.262
Strain*Cohort '08				0.512***
Adjusted R^2	0.007	0.027	0.027	0.028
N	16,063			

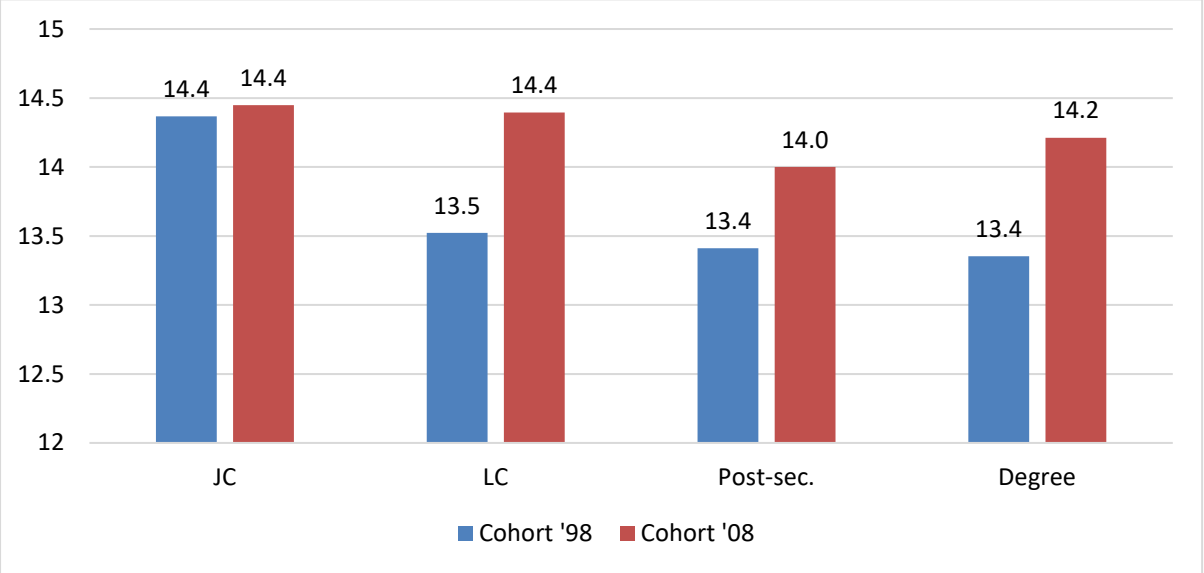
Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

TABLE 3.2 REGRESSION MODELS OF MATERNAL CONFLICT WITH THE 9-YEAR-OLD (PIANTA SCALE)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	14.260	14.251	14.368	14.192
Cohort '08	0.809***	0.590***	0.081	0.725*
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		-0.185*	-0.129	-0.124
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		-0.639***	-0.846***	-0.614***
Post-secondary		-0.846***	-0.956***	-0.855***
Degree		-0.745***	-1.014***	-0.749***
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		0.145	0.156	0.205
Managerial		-0.093	-0.080	-0.061
Other non-manual		-0.094	-0.081	-0.181
Skilled manual		0.095	0.115	0.026
Non-employed		0.270	0.306	0.433
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		1.352***	1.354***	1.663***
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		0.527**	0.521**	0.527**
Child born outside Ireland		0.041	0.081	0.025
Lone-parent family		0.160	0.146	0.140
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Large family		-0.307**	-0.305**	-0.311**
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		1.912***	1.902***	1.912***
Urban location		0.353***	0.347***	0.348***
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		0.835***	0.836***	0.836***
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			-0.139	-0.141
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			0.791*	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			0.508	
Degree*Cohort '08			0.777*	
Professional*Cohort '08				-0.095
Managerial*Cohort '08				-0.054
Non-manual*Cohort '08				0.203
Skilled*Cohort '08				0.177
Non-employed*Cohort '08				-0.407
Strain*Cohort '08				-0.543+
Adjusted R^2	0.005	0.041	0.041	0.041
N		16,059		

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

FIGURE 3.2 PREDICTED MOTHER-CHILD CONFLICT (PIANTA SUBSCALES) FOR 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 BY PARENTAL EDUCATION



Source: Calculated from Table 3.2.
Note: JC – Junior Certificate (lower secondary), LC – Leaving Certificate, Post-sec. – post-secondary non-tertiary.

The gender gap in mother-child conflict does not vary by cohort (Table 3.2, Model 3). However, a notable shift is evident in patterns by parental education (Table 3.2, Model 3, illustrated in Figure 3.2). Conflict increases more over time for those with Leaving Certificate or higher education, resulting in fewer differences in mother-child conflict by parental education for the younger cohort. The gap by financial strain also decreases somewhat over time (from 1.6 to 1.1 points). In contrast, there is no variation by social class or income for either cohort.

As noted in Chapter 1, reports of father-child closeness and conflict are collected only for resident fathers. Like maternal closeness, father-child closeness is found to increase between the two cohorts, a pattern that is not accounted for by compositional change in the families (Table 3.3, Models 1 and 2). Few of the background factors are significantly related to paternal closeness, though closeness is more evident for daughters and less evident where the family is experiencing financial strain, living in rented accommodation and where the child has an illness/disability. The patterns are fairly similar between cohorts by gender and social background, though there is some evidence of less of an improvement in father-child closeness in high-income and graduate households (Tables 3.3 and A3.1).

Father-child conflict also increases between cohorts, but this pattern is due to changes in the profile of fathers and families (Table 3.4, Models 1 and 2). Fathers

experiencing financial strain,[13] in non-employed households, living in urban areas and in rented accommodation report higher levels of conflict as do those whose child has a disability/SEN. Fathers of daughters report lower levels of conflict than do fathers of sons. The patterns by gender and social background do not vary across cohorts except for non-employed families where this is associated with higher conflict for Cohort '98 but not Cohort '08. The pattern by parental education changes somewhat between cohorts, with fewer such differences found for Cohort '08. Patterns did not vary by household income for either cohort (Tables 3.5 and A3.2).

[13] Being under financial strain is significantly related to father-child conflict but income levels per se are not related to conflict levels (see Table A3.1).

TABLE 3.3 REGRESSION MODELS OF PATERNAL CLOSENESS TO THE 9-YEAR-OLD (PIANTA SCALE)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	31.912	31.942	31.849	32.058
Cohort '08	0.436***	0.526***	1.028***	0.283
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		0.215***	0.241**	0.235**
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		-0.051	0.038	-0.065
Post-secondary		0.018	0.102	-0.007
Degree		-0.092	0.030	-0.101
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		-0.180	-0.179	-0.256
Managerial		-0.086	-0.085	-0.155
Other non-manual		-0.064	-0.062	-0.192
Skilled manual		0.158	0.157	-0.015
Non-employed		0.287	0.271	-0.030
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		-0.234*	-0.229+	-0.429*
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		0.030	0.038	0.020
Child born outside Ireland		-0.028	-0.046	-0.027
Large family		-0.016	-0.022	-0.017
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		-0.361***	-0.363***	-0.371***
Urban location		0.054	0.056	0.052
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		-0.312**	-0.321**	-0.316**
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			-0.048	-0.048
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			-0.526+	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			-0.482+	
Degree*Cohort '08			-0.553*	
Professional*Cohort '08				0.195
Managerial*Cohort '08				0.171
Non-manual*Cohort '08				0.319
Skilled*Cohort '08				0.467+
Non-employed*Cohort '08				0.810*
Strain*Cohort '08				0.328
Adjusted R^2	0.005	0.009	0.010	0.010
N	11,358			

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

TABLE 3.4 REGRESSION MODELS OF PATERNAL CONFLICT WITH THE 9-YEAR-OLD (PIANTA SCALE)

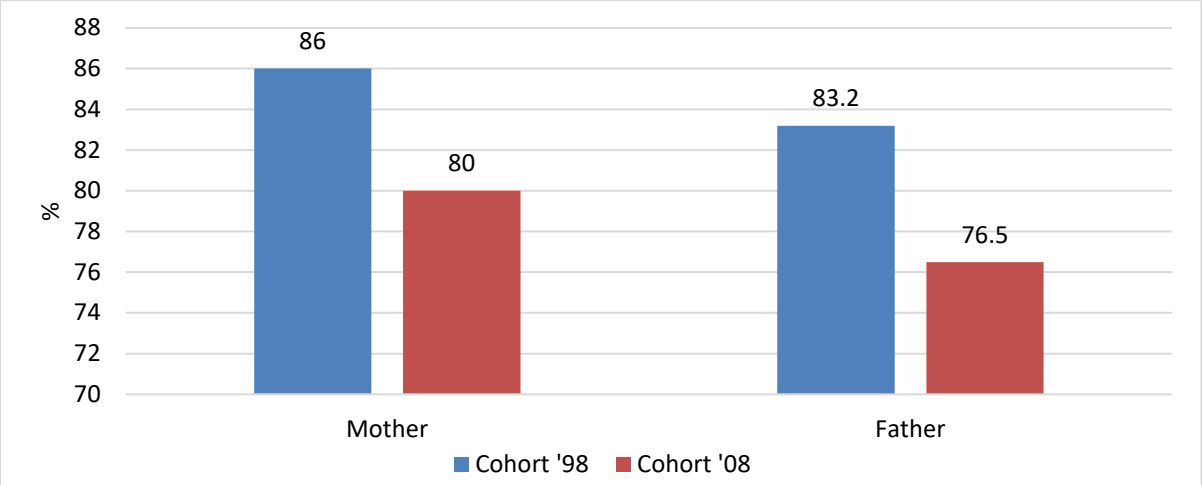
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	14.143	13.903	13.998	13.927
Cohort '08	0.381***	0.129	-0.254	0.023
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		-0.382***	-0.474***	-0.478***
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		-0.082	-0.186	-0.047
Post-secondary		-0.178	-0.121	-0.175
Degree		0.223	0.108	0.224
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		-0.152	-0.152	-0.168
Managerial		-0.258	-0.257	-0.280
Other non-manual		-0.044	-0.037	-0.023
Skilled manual		-0.155	-0.148	-0.261
Non-employed		0.703*	0.702*	1.589***
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		1.139***	1.131***	1.119***
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		-0.157	-0.168	-0.156
Child born outside Ireland		0.290	0.313	0.291
Large family		-0.039	-0.035	-0.020
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		1.331***	1.334***	1.343***
Urban location		0.621***	0.619***	0.623***
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		0.811***	0.811***	0.819***
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			0.214	0.213
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			0.623	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			0.086	
Degree*Cohort '08			0.386	
Professional*Cohort '08				0.051
Managerial*Cohort '08				0.066
Non-manual*Cohort '08				-0.049
Skilled*Cohort '08				0.317
Non-employed*Cohort '08				-2.272**
Strain*Cohort '08				0.069
Adjusted R^2	0.001	0.022	0.022	0.023
N	11,358			

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

3.3 CHILD REPORTS OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

The previous section looked at parent-child closeness and conflict as reported by mothers and fathers. This section draws on the children's own perspectives, in particular, the extent to which they report getting on 'very well' with their mothers and fathers. Unlike the father-reported measures, child-reported measures are collected in relation to both resident and non-resident fathers.[14] A high proportion reported getting on very well with their parents, though this percentage declined between cohorts – from 86 per cent to 80 per cent for mothers and from 83 per cent to 77 per cent for fathers (Figure 3.3).[15]

FIGURE 3.3 PERCENTAGE OF 9-YEAR-OLDS WHO REPORT GETTING ON 'VERY WELL' WITH THEIR MOTHERS AND FATHERS (COHORTS '98 AND '08)



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.

Because the outcome is binary (getting on very well as opposed to fairly well/not getting on), logistic regression models are used, with the coefficients presented in terms of odds ratios. A value of less than one indicates a factor is associated with a lower likelihood of the outcome (in this case, getting on very well with a parent) while a value of more than one indicates an increased likelihood. The decline between cohorts in the 9-year-old's report of getting on very well with their mother was not related to changes in the profile of children and their families (Models 1 and 2, Table 3.5). Girls reported better relationships with their mothers, a pattern that did not change between cohorts. Relationships were also seen as better by those in urban areas. Relationships were somewhat less positive where parents had Leaving Certificate or degree-level qualifications and for those from

[14] An investigation of the differences in the quality of relationships between non-resident fathers and children is outside the scope of the current study. Previous research (Smyth and Russell, 2021) indicated that 65 per cent of those not living with their fathers reported getting on very well with them compared with 79 per cent of those living with their fathers, though it is worth noting that the majority did indicate a positive relationship.

[15] These analyses distinguish between those who get on 'very well' and those who get on 'fairly well' or 'don't get on'. The latter group is too small to report separately.

skilled manual backgrounds. In contrast to the pattern for parent reports, the association between financial strain and child perceptions of relationship quality was only on the margins of significance and this association appeared to strengthen between cohorts.

TABLE 3.5 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF THE CHILD REPORTING GETTING ON VERY WELL WITH MOTHER (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	6.149***	6.467***	6.786***	6.231***
Cohort '08	0.650***	0.632***	0.555***	0.684***
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		1.537***	1.504***	1.497***
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		0.718***	0.639***	0.726***
Post-secondary		0.942	1.062	0.938
Degree		0.769**	0.716**	0.763**
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		0.953	0.957	1.121
Managerial		1.003	1.010	1.010
Other non-manual		0.877	0.888	0.907
Skilled manual		0.826*	0.838*	0.842
Non-employed		1.078	1.088	1.125
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		0.878+	0.874+	1.152
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		0.960	0.956	0.957
Child born outside Ireland		0.874	0.881	0.866
Lone-parent family		0.960	0.952	0.954
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Large family		0.960	0.960	0.958
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		0.895+	0.892*	0.897+
Urban location		1.180***	1.177***	1.178***
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		0.970	0.965	0.971
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			1.043	1.050
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			1.478*	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			0.891	
Degree*Cohort '08			1.169	
Professional*Cohort '08				0.773
Managerial*Cohort '08				0.991
Non-manual*Cohort '08				0.938
Skilled*Cohort '08				0.967
Non-employed*Cohort '08				0.905
Strain*Cohort '08				0.661**
Nagelkerke R^2	0.011	0.029	0.031	0.030
N		15,421		

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

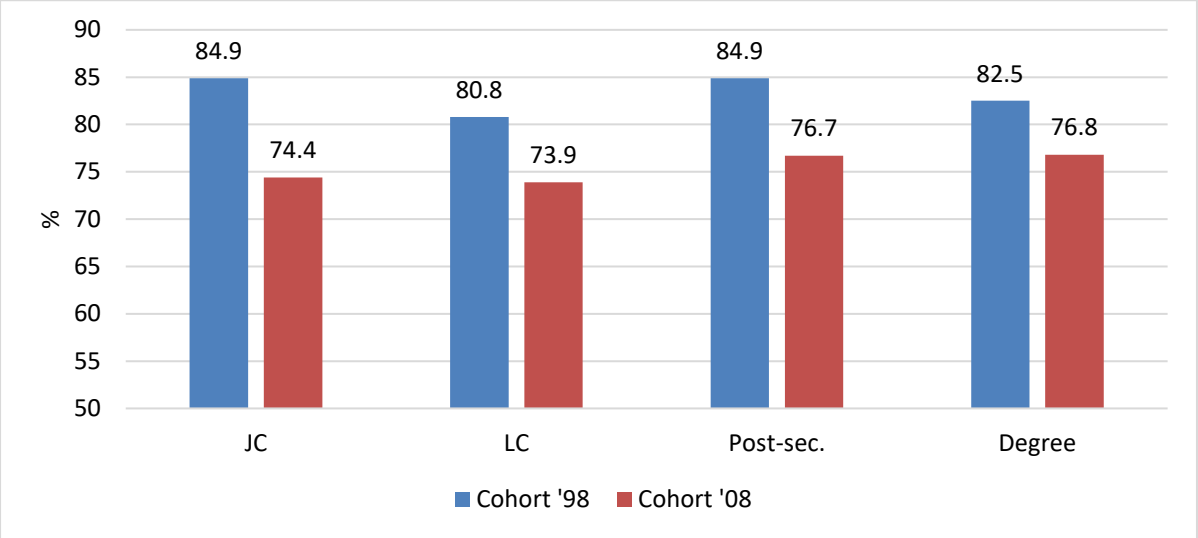
TABLE 3.6 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF THE CHILD REPORTING GETTING ON VERY WELL WITH FATHER (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	4.961***	55.30***	5.843***	4.762***
Cohort '08	0.656***	0.657***	0.552**	0.866
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		1.367***	1.407***	1.407***
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		0.786**	0.700***	0.794**
Post-secondary		0.956	0.942	0.963
Degree		0.873+	0.788*	0.874+
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		1.010	1.015	1.139
Managerial		1.022	1.029	1.093
Other non-manual		1.012	1.020	1.243+
Skilled manual		1.028	1.037	1.147
Non-employed		1.545***	1.571***	2.183***
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		0.822**	0.819**	1.000
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		0.831*	0.830*	0.830*
Child born outside Ireland		0.914	0.924	0.910
Lone-parent family		0.631***	0.625***	0.623***
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Large family		0.804***	0.803***	0.807***
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		0.838**	0.834**	0.838**
Urban location		1.091*	1.090*	1.094*
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		0.827**	0.823**	0.827**
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			0.944	0.947
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			1.429*	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			0.414	
Degree*Cohort '08			1.282+	
Professional*Cohort '08				0.795
Managerial*Cohort '08				0.880
Non-manual*Cohort '08				0.675*
Skilled*Cohort '08				0.810
Non-employed*Cohort '08				0.533**
Strain*Cohort '08				0.751+
Adjusted R^2	0.011	0.033	0.034	0.035
N		14,809		

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

As with mothers, the decline in the child's relationship with their father between cohorts was not accounted for by compositional trends (Table 3.6). As with mothers too, relationships were more positive for girls and those in urban areas; they were also more positive for 9-year-olds in non-employed households. Relationships tended to be less positive in lone-parent families (where fathers were living outside the family home), where the household was experiencing financial strain, in larger families and where the family was in rented accommodation. Variation by parental education was not linear, being less positive where parents had a Leaving Certificate or degree-level qualification than where they had lower secondary or post-secondary education. Relationships were also poorer in migrant-origin families and where the child had a disability/SEN.

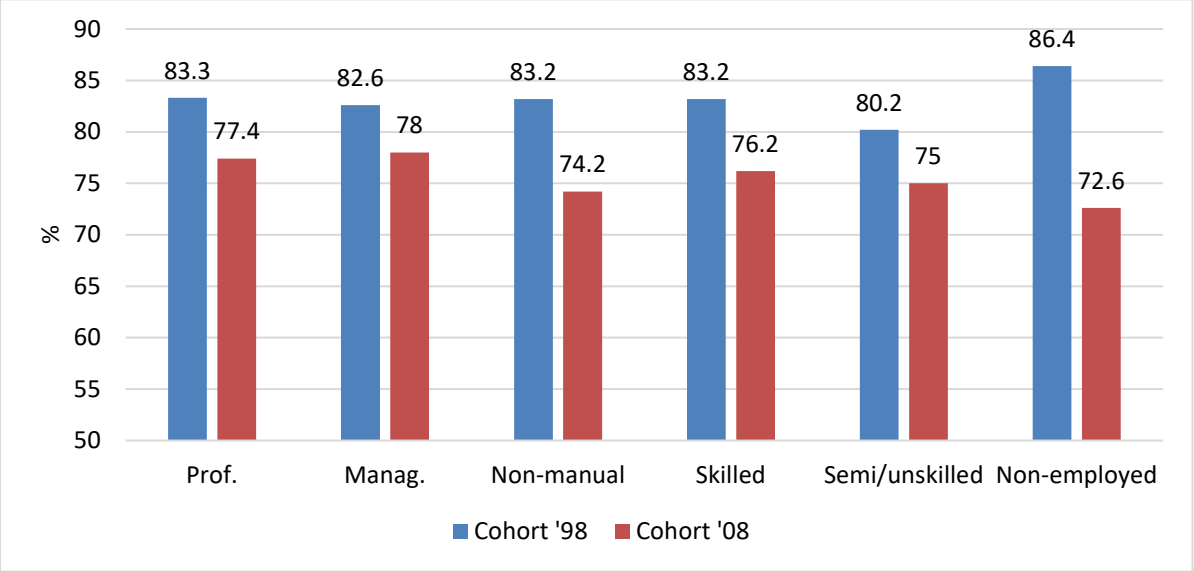
FIGURE 3.4 PREDICTED PROPORTION GETTING ON VERY WELL WITH THEIR FATHERS AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 BY PARENTAL EDUCATION



Source: Calculated from Table 3.6.

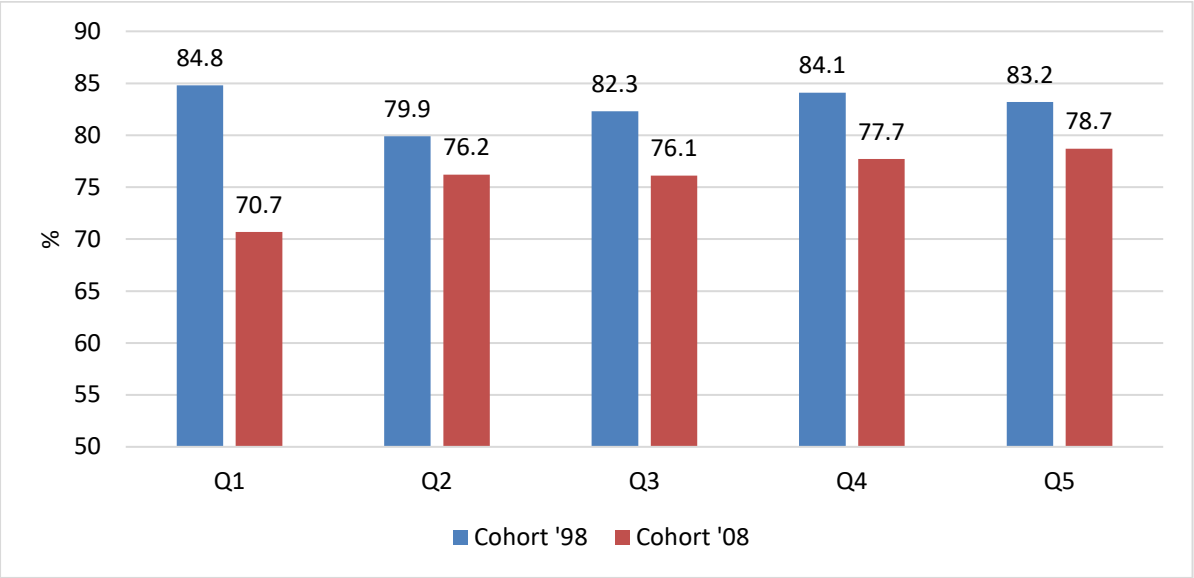
For Cohort '98, relationships with fathers were seen as more positive among 9-year-olds who had parents with Junior Certificate or post-secondary qualifications (Figure 3.4). However, for Cohort '08, relationships disimproved slightly more for these groups, resulting in less differentiation by parental education for the more recent group of children. There were also some changes in the social class patterns, with a greater decline in the quality of the relationship found in non-employed families (Figure 3.5). In keeping with this pattern, a greater decline in relationship quality was found among families in the lowest income quintile than in other income groups (Figure 3.6).

FIGURE 3.5 PREDICTED PROPORTION GETTING ON VERY WELL WITH THEIR FATHERS AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 BY SOCIAL CLASS



Source: Calculated from Table 3.6.

FIGURE 3.6 PREDICTED PROPORTION GETTING ON VERY WELL WITH THEIR FATHERS AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME

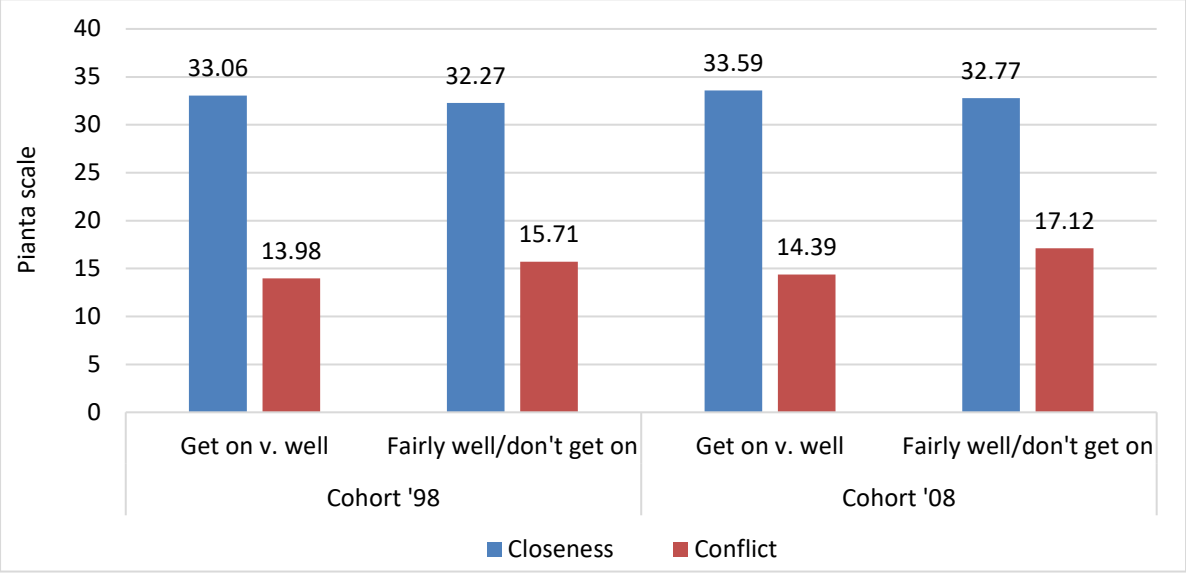


Source: Calculated from Table 3.6.

There is a notable contrast between the trends in parent-reported and child-reported measures of relationship quality, with parents reporting increases in both closeness and conflict while children report an overall decline in getting on well with their parents (albeit from a high base). Figures 3.7 and 3.8 show the relationship between child and parent reports. Parent-reported closeness tends to be higher in cases where the child reports getting on very well with them, though the difference is relatively small in size. There is a somewhat stronger relationship

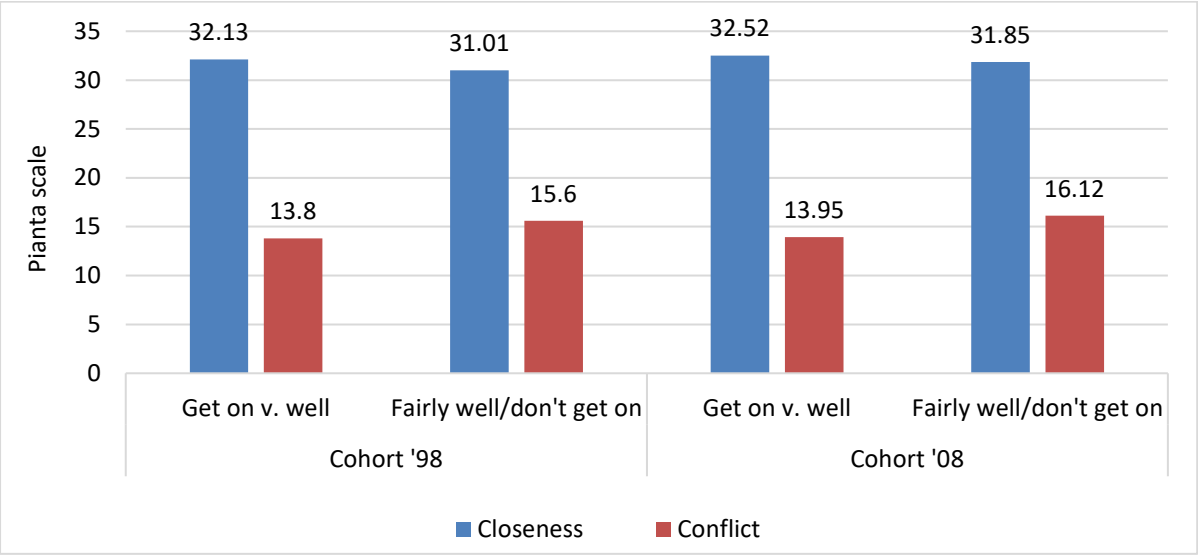
between higher levels of parent-reported conflict and children not reporting getting on very well with their parents. Thus, there is not necessarily a strong match between the perspectives of children and parents, though this is likely to be driven by the large and therefore heterogeneous group of children who get on very well with their parents.

FIGURE 3.7 AVERAGE MOTHER-REPORTED CLOSENESS AND CONFLICT BY WHETHER THE 9-YEAR-OLD REPORTS GETTING ON WELL WITH THEIR MOTHER



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.

FIGURE 3.8 AVERAGE FATHER-REPORTED CLOSENESS AND CONFLICT BY WHETHER THE 9-YEAR-OLD REPORTS GETTING ON WELL WITH THEIR FATHER



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.

3.4 FAMILY TIME TOGETHER

The extent to which families reported eating dinner together every day was used as a proxy for family time together. There was a significant decline between cohorts, from 72 per cent to 67 per cent, in the proportion eating together every day. This trend is not accounted for by compositional changes over the decade between the cohorts (Table 3.7).

Eating dinner together is found to vary by social background, being more prevalent among families with lower levels of education, those in manual (skilled/semi/ unskilled) occupations and those experiencing financial strain. Eating together every day is less common in lone-parent families and among those living in urban areas but more common in large and migrant-origin families. Eating together does not vary by child characteristics – gender and having a disability/SEN.

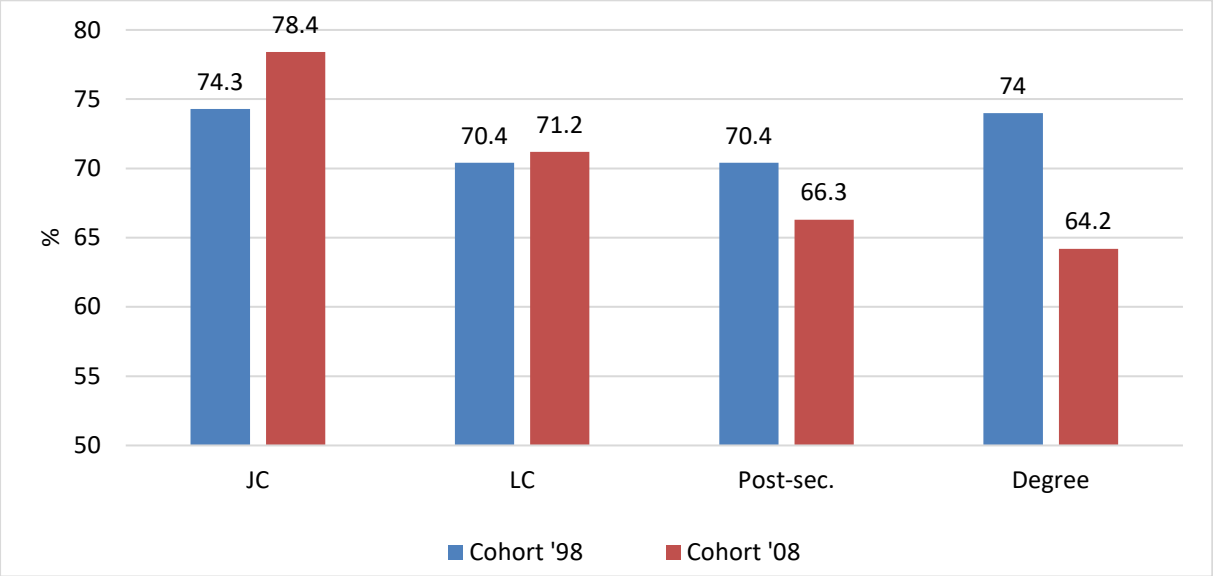
TABLE 3.7 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF THE FAMILY EATING DINNER TOGETHER EVERY DAY (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	2.591***	3.419***	3.038***	2.868***
Cohort '08	0.791***	0.815***	1.232+	1.264*
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		0.983	1.018	1.021
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		0.838**	0.879+	0.807***
Post-secondary		0.808***	0.908	0.773***
Degree		0.886+	1.134	0.873*
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		0.800**	0.806*	1.160
Managerial		0.775***	0.783***	1.034
Other non-manual		0.838**	0.849*	0.992
Skilled manual		1.092	1.099	1.348**
Non-employed		1.427***	1.421***	1.256*
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		1.158*	1.148*	1.209*
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		1.190**	1.197**	1.176*
Child born outside Ireland		1.023	0.982	1.028
Lone-parent family		0.634***	0.631***	0.644***
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Large family		1.302***	1.293***	1.294**
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		1.077	1.075	1.074
Urban location		0.882***	0.885**	0.884**
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		0.963	0.954	0.952
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			0.944	0.936
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			0.854	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			0.663**	
Degree*Cohort '08			0.532***	
Professional*Cohort '08				0.489***
Managerial*Cohort '08				0.546***
Non-manual*Cohort '08				0.699**
Skilled*Cohort '08				0.643**
Non-employed*Cohort '08				1.511*
Strain*Cohort '08				0.906
Adjusted R^2	0.004	0.026	0.030	0.033
N		16,045		

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

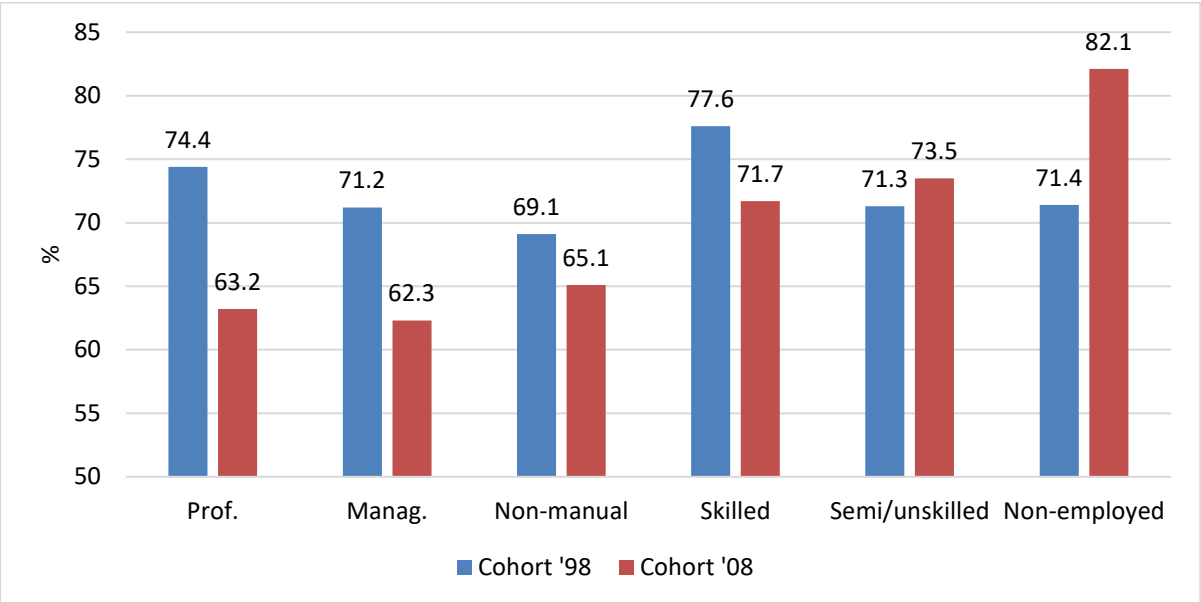
Changes between cohorts are found to vary by parental education, with the greatest decline among graduate families and a slight increase among those with lower secondary education (Figure 3.9). Similarly, declines are more evident among professional and managerial households and those in the highest income quintile with slight increases in non-employed households (Figures 3.10 and 3.11).

FIGURE 3.9 PREDICTED PROPORTION DINING TOGETHER EVERY DAY AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 BY PARENTAL EDUCATION



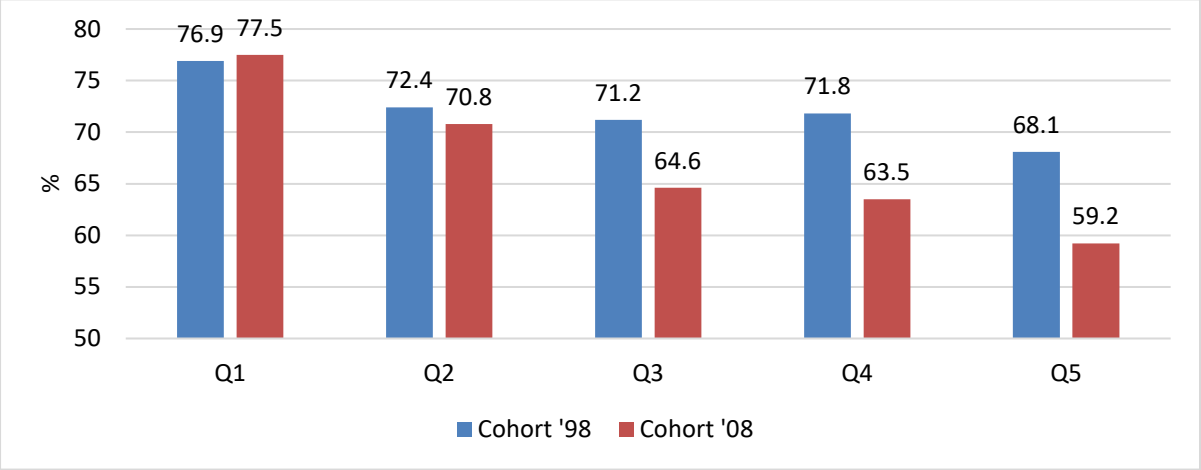
Source: Calculated from Table 3.7.

FIGURE 3.10 PREDICTED PROPORTION DINING TOGETHER EVERY DAY AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 BY SOCIAL CLASS



Source: Calculated from Table 3.7.

FIGURE 3.11 PREDICTED PROPORTION DINING TOGETHER EVERY DAY AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME



Source: Calculated from Table 3.7.

Table 3.8 explores whether the trend in the frequency of families dining together is linked to changes in child-reported relationship quality; the model also takes account of parent-reported closeness and conflict. As might be expected given the descriptive patterns outlined above (Figures 3.7 and 3.8), 9-year-olds report getting on better with their parents when their parents report higher levels of closeness and lower levels of conflict. Children in families that eat dinner together every day report better relationships with their mothers but no such difference is evident for relationships with fathers. Perhaps surprisingly, however, the relationship between dining together regularly and relationship quality is weaker for Cohort '08 than for Cohort '98. Overall, changes in parent-reported closeness and conflict and the decline in eating together daily do not account for the decline over time in children getting on very well with their parents.

TABLE 3.8 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENT-REPORTED RELATIONSHIP WITH CHILD, FAMILY EATING DINNER TOGETHER EVERY DAY AND WHETHER THE CHILD GETS ON VERY WELL WITH PARENTS (ODDS RATIOS)

	Mother	Father
Cohort '08	0.628***	0.657***
(Ref. Cohort '98)		
Parent-reported closeness	0.062***	0.056***
Parent-reported conflict	-0.050***	-0.049***
Family eats dinner together every day	0.212**	0.121+
Eats dinner daily*Cohort '08	-0.218*	-0.018
Adjusted R^2	0.078	0.069
N	16,030	12,275

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10. These models also control for gender, parental education, social class, financial strain, migrant status, family structure and size, disability, urban/rural location and housing tenure.

3.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has looked at the nature of relationships between parents and children and how they have changed over the decade between Cohorts '98 and '08. At both time points, parents report a relationship with their children characterised by closeness and relatively low levels of conflict while most 9-year-olds indicate they get on very well with their parents. Some changes are evident over time, with an increase in parent-child closeness and mother-child conflict but a decline in the proportion of children who report getting on very well with their mothers and fathers. The change in parent-reported relationship quality is relatively small in size, but on a par with the effect size for several other explanatory factors. More positive relationships are reported in relation to daughters than sons, which may reflect differences in behaviour, temperament or interaction that are outside the scope of the current study. Experience of financial strain and living in rented accommodation (social or private) emerge as risk factors for poorer quality parent-child relations, though the effect of financial strain appears to attenuate somewhat over time.

Eating together every day is used as a proxy for family time together. This activity is less frequent among more advantaged families, perhaps reflecting differential working hours and the greater involvement of middle-class children in structured out-of-school activities. Dining together daily becomes somewhat less frequent over time, with increasing differentiation evident by family background. Dining together is associated with a more positive relationship with mothers but not fathers, though this relationship is weaker for the younger cohort.

TABLE A3.1 SENSITIVITY ANALYSES OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS (PARENT-REPORTED) TO INCLUDE HOUSEHOLD INCOME QUINTILE

	Maternal closeness	Maternal conflict	Paternal closeness	Paternal conflict
Constant	32.808	13.749	31.987	13.764
Cohort '08	0.626***	0.358	0.753***	0.292
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Household income quintile:				
Quintile 2	0.012	-0.177	-0.046	0.115
Quintile 3	-0.076	-0.024	-0.162	0.239
Quintile 4	-0.054	-0.050	-0.136	-0.067
Quintile 5	-0.053	-0.495*	-0.217	0.008
Income missing	0.255*	-0.161	0.041	-0.071
(Ref. Lowest quintile)				
Quintile 2*Cohort '08	-0.028	0.320	-0.114	-0.373
Quintile 3*Cohort '08	-0.156	0.311	-0.141	-0.544
Quintile 4*Cohort '08	-0.229	0.189	-0.270	0.160
Quintile 5*Cohort '08	-0.229+	0.442	-0.435*	-0.271
Income missing*Cohort '08	-0.127	0.151	-0.388	-0.049
Adjusted R^2	0.026	0.034	0.009	0.018
N	16,063	16,059	11,358	11,358

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10. The models also control for gender, family structure, family size, migrant status, urban/rural location and housing tenure.

TABLE A3.2 SENSITIVITY ANALYSES OF CHILD-REPORTED RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS AND PARENT REPORTS OF FAMILY EATING TOGETHER EVERY DAY TO INCLUDE HOUSEHOLD INCOME QUINTILE (ODDS RATIOS)

Text	Gets on very well with mother	Gets on very well with father	Family eat dinner together
Constant	4.979***	6.629***	3.591***
Cohort '08	0.615***	0.450***	1.072
(Ref. Cohort '98)			
Household income quintile:			
Quintile 2	0.997	0.632***	0.763***
Quintile 3	1.005	0.699**	0.715***
Quintile 4	1.010	0.745**	0.729***
Quintile 5	0.941	0.693**	0.611***
Income missing	1.081	0.779+	0.792*
(Ref. Lowest quintile)			
Quintile 2*Cohort '08	1.076	1.836***	0.876
Quintile 3*Cohort '08	0.968	1.541**	0.697**
Quintile 4*Cohort '08	0.939	1.508***	0.642***
Quintile 5*Cohort '08	1.188	1.674***	0.654***
Income missing*Cohort '08	1.039	1.680**	0.734*
Nagelkerke R^2	0.025	0.031	0.028
N	15,421	14,809	16,045

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10. The models also control for gender, family structure, family size, migrant status, urban/rural location and housing tenure.

CHAPTER 4
Changes in peer relationships and activities

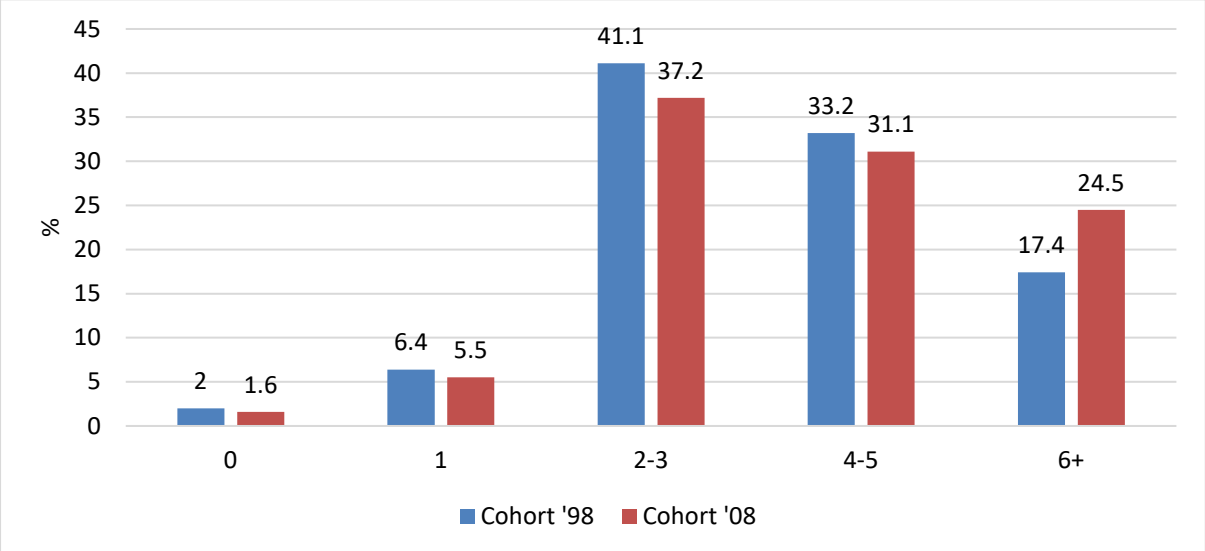
4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at potential changes in the number of close friends 9-year-olds have as well as how frequently they see them. The chapter then looks at the involvement of 9-year-olds in sports and physical exercise before analysing mobile phone ownership and engagement in screentime. The approach adopted is the same as in Chapter 3 with analyses first showing 'raw' differences between cohorts before examining whether any such differences hold when we take account of the changes in cohort composition.

4.2 PEERS

The mothers of the 9-year-olds were asked how many close friends their children had. In both waves, the most common pattern was having two or three close friends. There was some increase between cohorts in the proportion with larger friendship groups, that is, six or more close friends, from 17 to 25 per cent (Figure 4.1).

FIGURE 4.1 THE NUMBER OF CLOSE FRIENDS FOR 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 (AS REPORTED BY THEIR MOTHERS)



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.

TABLE 4.1 ORDINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF THE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CHILD'S NUMBER OF FRIENDS, AS REPORTED BY THE MOTHER (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Cohort '08	1.326***	1.431***	1.707***	1.401**
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		0.891**	0.919*	0.916*
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		0.968	1.006	0.972
Post-secondary		0.978	1.069	0.990
Degree		0.984	1.023	0.988
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		1.075	1.070	1.078
Managerial		0.971	0.967	0.922
Other non-manual		0.958	0.958	0.959
Skilled manual		0.963	0.962	0.966
Non-employed		0.885+	0.881+	0.797*
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		0.807***	0.806***	0.894
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		0.690***	0.692***	0.693***
Child born outside Ireland		0.919	0.915	0.918
Lone-parent family		1.155**	1.155**	1.158**
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Large family		0.994	0.994	0.991
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		0.599***	0.598***	0.599***
Urban location		1.005	1.006	1.005
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		0.912*	0.912*	0.912*
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			0.937	0.940
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			0.868	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			0.801*	
Degree*Cohort '08			0.870	
Professional*Cohort '08				1.014
Managerial*Cohort '08				1.124
Non-manual*Cohort '08				1.000
Skilled*Cohort '08				0.989
Non-employed*Cohort '08				1.280+
Strain*Cohort '08				0.835+
N		16,123		

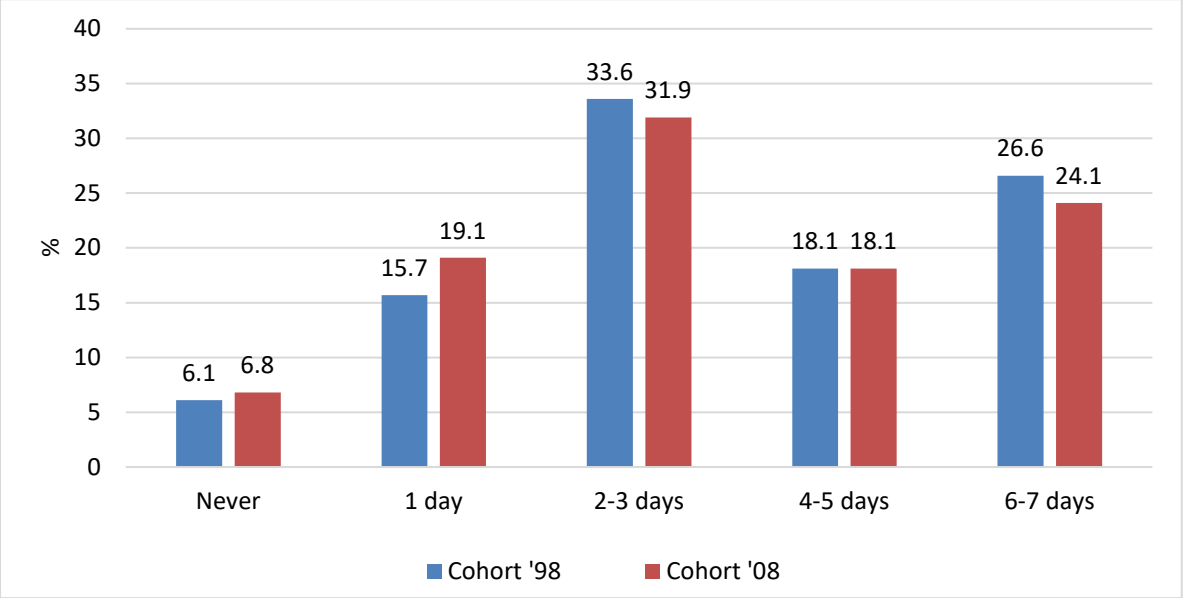
Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

The models examine the factors associated with having more close friends. An ordinal logit model is used to take account of the 'ordered' nature of the categories, ranging from no friends to having six or more. The coefficients can be interpreted in the same way as those for logistic regression models, with values below 1 indicating a reduced likelihood of having a greater number of friends and values over 1 indicating an increased likelihood. In keeping with the change depicted in Figure 4.1, Model 1 in Table 4.1 shows a significant increase in the size of friendship groups, with this increase holding when controlling for child and family characteristics (compare Models 1 and 2).

Girls tend to have fewer friends than boys. The largest differences are found by disability and migrant status, with fewer friends found among these groups (Tables 4.1 and A4.1). There is little systematic variation by family background, though those from lone-parent families have more friends while experience of financial strain and living in rented accommodation are associated with having smaller friendship networks. There is little systematic evidence of any change between cohorts in the relationship between gender and family background factors and the size of friendship networks (Models 3 and 4).

Mothers were also asked how often their children did things with their friends outside school hours. The question does not explicitly exclude online contact with friends but the wording seems likely to indicate face-to-face interaction. This question preceded the one on close friends so may relate to a larger group of friends, not just those considered close. The most common pattern of contact was two to three days a week (Figure 4.2). There is a slight reduction between cohorts in the frequency of contact with friends.

FIGURE 4.2 THE NUMBER OF DAYS PER WEEK 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 'DO SOMETHING WITH THEIR FRIENDS OUTSIDE SCHOOL HOURS' (AS REPORTED BY THEIR MOTHERS)



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.

The models in Table 4.2 focus on the likelihood of seeing friends almost every day (that is, 6-7 days per week). In keeping with the descriptive pattern in Figure 4.3, there is a slight reduction in this level of contact between cohorts. However, this shift is found to be due to compositional changes in the profile of 9-year-olds and their families, with no significant differences between cohorts once child and family factors are taken into account.

Girls not only have smaller friendship networks (see Table 4.1) but see their friends somewhat less often outside school. Contact is also less frequent for children from migrant backgrounds and among those with a disability/SEN. Contact is more frequent among those from families with lower levels of education, from lone-parent families, among those living in rented accommodation and among those in the lowest income quintile. There are no differences by urban/rural location in the number of close friends but 9-year-olds in urban areas are much more likely to see their friends almost every day.

Differences by social background do not change between cohorts. However, frequent contact declines slightly more for boys than for girls, with the predicted proportion going from 29 to 25 per cent for boys and 25 to 23 per cent for girls.

TABLE 4.2 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF THE 9-YEAR-OLD SEEING THEIR FRIENDS ALMOST EVERY DAY, AS REPORTED BY THE MOTHER (ODDS RATIOS)

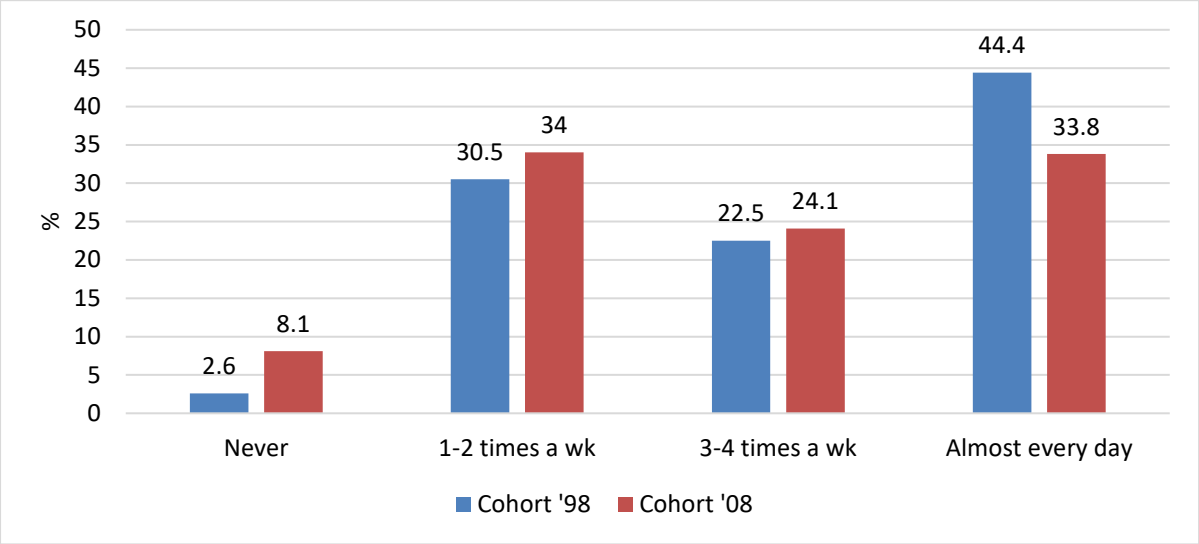
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	0.362***	0.325***	0.347***	0.359***
Cohort '08	0.877***	0.977	0.814*	0.780*
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		0.794***	0.731***	0.733***
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		0.654***	0.657***	0.658***
Post-secondary		0.654***	0.595***	0.652***
Degree		0.551***	0.518***	0.547***
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		0.839+	0.837+	0.799+
Managerial		1.043	1.040	0.964
Other non-manual		0.993	0.986	0.885
Skilled manual		1.095	1.089	1.020
Non-employed		1.029	1.028	1.032
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		0.988	0.994	0.959
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		0.727***	0.724***	0.729***
Child born outside Ireland		0.844+	0.854+	0.842*
Lone-parent family		1.334***	1.338***	1.330***
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Large family		1.055	1.059	1.056
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		0.818***	0.822***	0.822***
Urban location		2.468***	2.467***	2.464***
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		1.551***	1.561***	1.557***
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			1.191*	1.189*
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			0.954	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			1.223	
Degree*Cohort '08			1.169	
Professional*Cohort '08				1.132
Managerial*Cohort '08				1.195
Non-manual*Cohort '08				1.292+
Skilled*Cohort '08				1.168
Non-employed*Cohort '08				0.976
Strain*Cohort '08				1.065
Adjusted R^2	0.001	0.100	0.101	0.101
N		16,039		

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

4.3 ENGAGEMENT IN SPORTS/PHYSICAL EXERCISE

The 9-year-olds reported how often they played sport per week in the survey. As indicated in Chapter 1, the time-use diaries also collected information on involvement in sports/exercise, but the description of the activity differed between cohorts so they are not fully comparable. Figure 4.3 shows a change between cohorts, with a noticeable reduction in the proportion playing almost every day (from 44 to 34 per cent). For Cohort '98 almost daily sport was the most common pattern, but a decade later the two largest groups were near-daily sport and playing 1-2 times per week.

FIGURE 4.3 THE NUMBER OF DAYS PER WEEK 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 REPORTED PLAYING SPORT



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.

Table 4.3 shows that this decline in frequent sport participation was not related to changes in the profile of children and families (compare Models 1 and 2). Variation was evident among different groups of children, with much lower levels of engagement among girls than boys. Engagement was also lower among children with disabilities and those from migrant backgrounds. Involvement was also less frequent among those in households experiencing financial strain or living in rented accommodation but more frequent in larger families.

TABLE 4.3 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF THE 9-YEAR-OLD ENGAGING IN SPORTS ALMOST EVERY DAY, AS REPORTED BY THE CHILD (ODDS RATIOS)

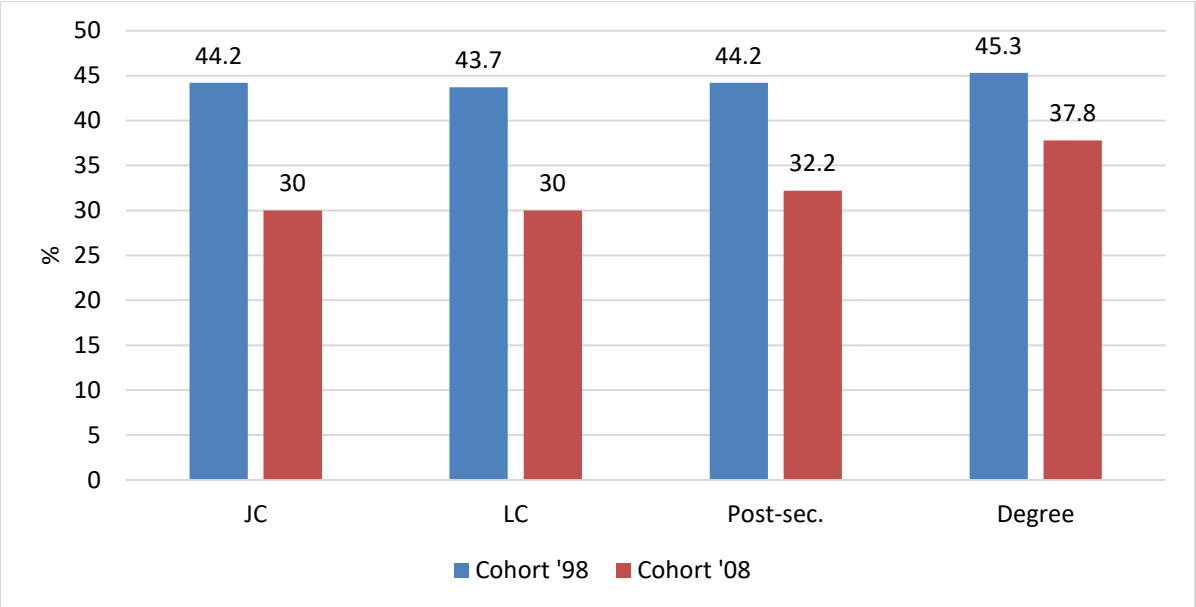
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	0.797***	1.312***	1.400***	1.375***
Cohort '08	0.642***	0.651***	0.502***	0.563***
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		0.389***	0.385***	0.385***
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		0.945	0.904	0.962
Post-secondary		0.946	0.901	0.974
Degree		1.113+	0.959	1.126+
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		1.024	1.020	0.817+
Managerial		1.009	1.005	0.903
Other non-manual		1.075	1.070	1.051
Skilled manual		1.109	1.108	1.042
Non-employed		1.125	1.133	1.187+
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		0.838**	0.843**	0.938
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		0.853*	0.849*	0.855*
Child born outside Ireland		0.866+	0.889	0.865+
Lone-parent family		1.019	1.019	1.005
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Large family		1.127**	1.132**	1.130**
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		0.741***	0.742***	0.744***
Urban location		0.935+	0.932*	0.931*
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		0.875**	0.880**	0.883*
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			1.011	1.016
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			1.183	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			1.265*	
Degree*Cohort '08			1.517***	
Professional*Cohort '08				1.553**
Managerial*Cohort '08				1.288*
Non-manual*Cohort '08				1.053
Skilled*Cohort '08				1.155
Non-employed*Cohort '08				0.842
Strain*Cohort '08				0.819
Nagelkerke R^2	0.016	0.089	0.091	0.092
N		15,885		

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

The gaps by gender or financial strain did not differ by cohort. However, there were changes by other background factors, which meant that social differentiation in sports engagement increased over the decade between Cohort '98 and Cohort '08. Frequent sports participation declined across all parental education levels, though the decline was much greater for those whose parents had lower levels of education (Figure 4.4). Similarly, the decline in sports engagement was small for the professional group but much larger for semi/unskilled manual and non-employed households (Figure 4.5). A similar pattern was evident by income, with an increasing gap between the top and bottom quintile groups over time (Figure 4.6).

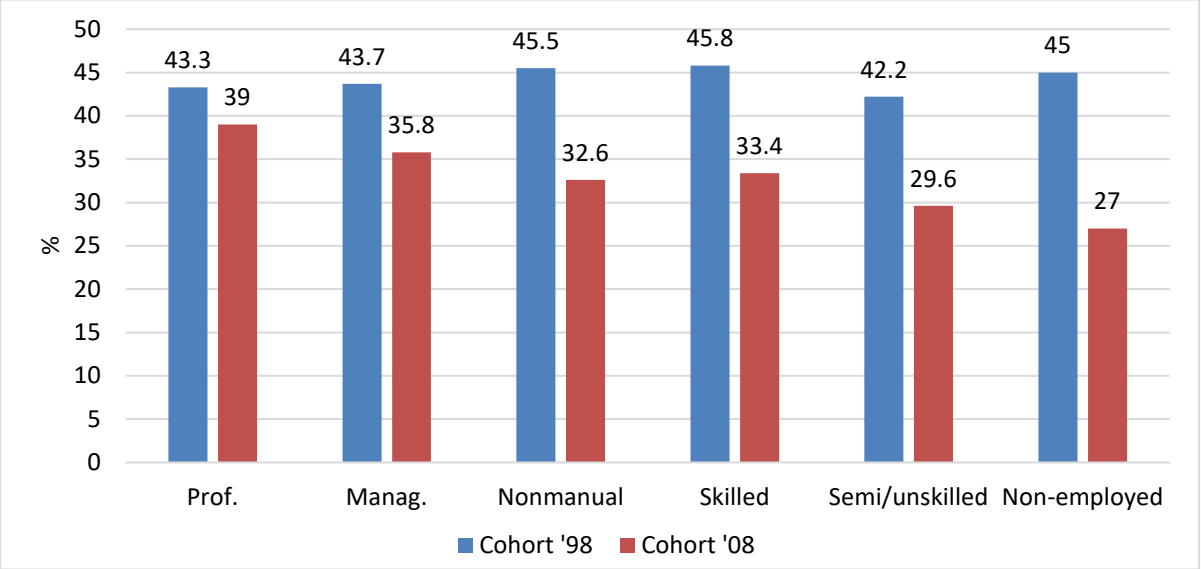
The shift in sports participation over just a decade was quite remarkable so additional information on the child's engagement in exercise collected from mothers was examined as a robustness check. Mothers were asked about the number of times in the last 14 days that the 9-year-old had engaged in hard exercise (enough to make them breathe heavily and their heart beat faster) and light exercise. The proportion of 9-year-olds doing hard exercise on nine or more days declined from 54 per cent for Cohort '98 to 51 per cent for Cohort '08. Doing light exercise on nine or more days declined from 69 per cent to 64 per cent. Therefore, these responses provide further evidence of a concerning decline in physical activity.

FIGURE 4.4 PREDICTED PROPORTION PLAYING SPORT ALMOST EVERY DAY BY PARENTAL EDUCATION



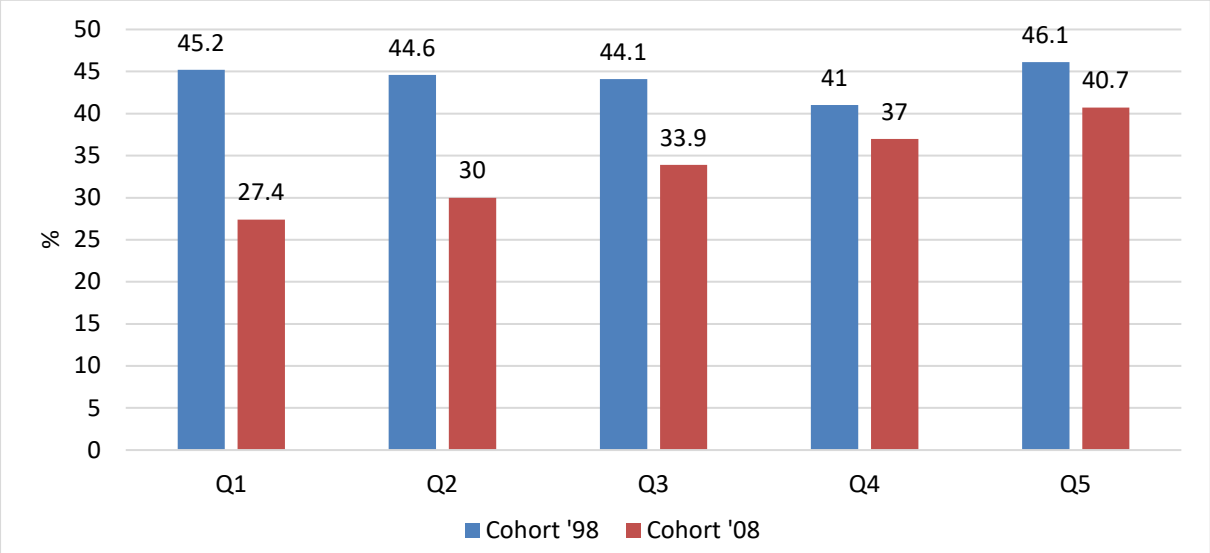
Source: Calculated from Table 4.3.

FIGURE 4.5 PREDICTED PROPORTION PLAYING SPORT ALMOST EVERY DAY BY SOCIAL CLASS



Source: Calculated from Table 4.3.

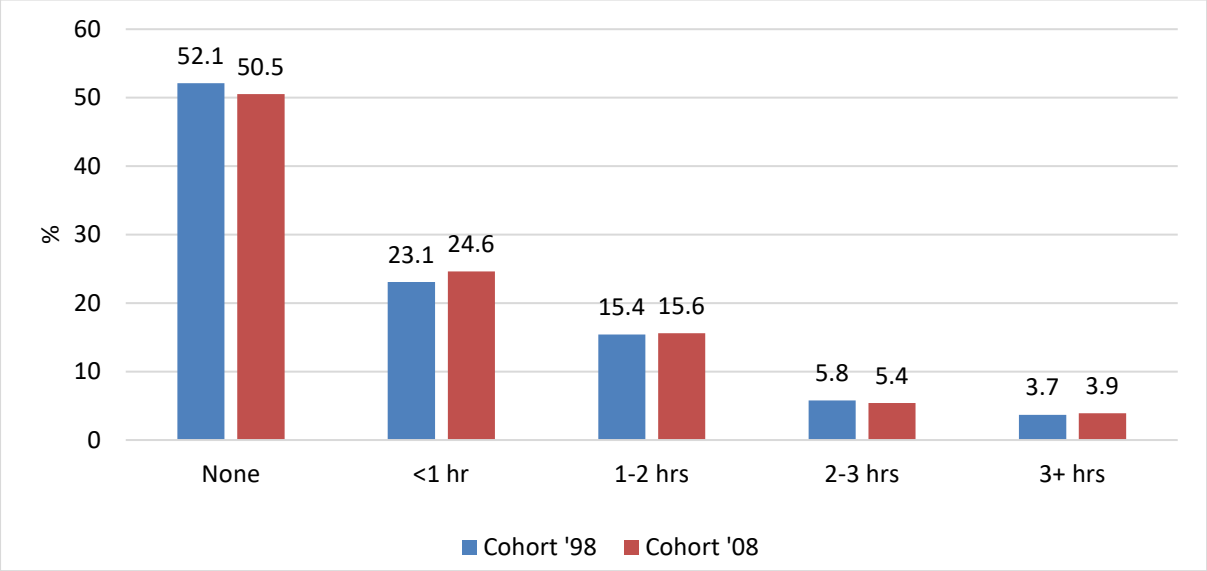
FIGURE 4.6 PREDICTED PROPORTION PLAYING SPORT ALMOST EVERY DAY BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME



Source: Calculated from Table 4.3.

To capture other forms of leisure, information on the time spent on general play recorded in the time-use diaries was analysed. General play included make-believe games or playing with toys. Around half of the 9-year-olds reported spending no time on general play on that specific day (Figure 4.7), with the most typical pattern being less than an hour. There was no change over time in engagement in general play, in contrast to the pattern for sport described above.

FIGURE 4.7 TIME SPENT ON 'GENERAL PLAY' (TIME-USE DIARY INFORMATION)



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.

The child and family factors associated with time on play are analysed in Table 4.4. As discussed in Chapter 1, time spent on general play was not normally distributed so time was recoded into the categories used in Figure 4.8 and ordinal logit models used to analyse the factors associated with more time on general play. As already noted, only the AMF version of the time-use data was available at the time of writing so family size and whether the child was born outside Ireland are not included in these models. In addition, controls are included for whether the diary was completed during the week or at the weekend and whether the period covered was during term-time or not. Not surprisingly, children spend less time on general play during the week and during term-time. There are no differences between cohorts either raw (as in Figure 4.8) or after taking account of child and family factors (Table 4.4).

Girls spend longer on general play than boys, with a slight tendency for this gender difference to increase between cohorts (though this is only significant at the $p<.10$ level). There is a complex pattern by social background, with more time on general play among the most and the least advantaged groups. Thus, children whose parents have post-secondary or tertiary qualifications spend longer on general play but so too do those from non-employed households and those experiencing financial strain. At the same time, less time is spent on general play among children living in rented accommodation. Children in migrant-origin families also spend more time on general play. There is little systematic change in these patterns between cohorts, though the effect of strain appears to reduce.

TABLE 4.4 ORDINAL LOGIT MODELS OF TIME SPENT ON GENERAL PLAY BY 9-YEAR-OLDS (WITH CATEGORIES OF NONE, <1 HOUR, 1-2 HOURS, 2-3 HOURS AND 3+ HOURS) (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Cohort '08	1.000	0.934	1.083	0.948
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Weekday	0.743***	0.738***	0.732***	0.734***
Term-time	0.623***	0.609***	0.610***	0.609***
Female		1.904***	1.784***	1.784***
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		1.113	1.189*	1.118
Post-secondary		1.157*	1.343**	1.156*
Degree		1.244**	1.257*	1.241**
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		1.058	1.047	1.130
Managerial		1.120	1.108	1.148
Other non-manual		0.976	0.970	1.037
Skilled manual		0.959	0.951	0.987
Non-employed		1.228*	1.212*	1.219
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		1.320***	1.324***	1.546***
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		1.222**	1.221**	1.219**
Lone-parent family		1.015	1.013	1.017
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Disability/illness		1.051	1.055	1.053
Urban location		1.040	1.039	1.041
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		0.769***	0.775***	0.769***
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			1.145+	1.142+
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			0.765	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			0.695*	
Degree*Cohort '08			0.863	
Professional*Cohort '08				0.889
Managerial*Cohort '08				0.951
Non-manual*Cohort '08				0.880
Skilled*Cohort '08				0.948
Non-employed*Cohort '08				1.019
Strain*Cohort '08				0.769+
N		9,745		

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

4.4 SCREENTIME

As indicated in Chapter 1, the measures used to capture screentime have changed between cohorts, reflecting the increased availability of digital devices and different modes of digital consumption. This section therefore draws on both the survey and time-use data to capture the time 9-year-olds spend watching television and other screentime, as well as whether they have a mobile phone. Unfortunately, information on access to other digital devices was not comparable across waves. Children of Cohort '98 were asked whether there was 'a computer at home', with 86 per reporting that there was. Among Cohort '08, 91 per cent had access to a desktop computer, laptop and/or tablet 'at home', with 47 per cent having another handheld device (such as a games device). Overall, almost all (95 per cent) children in Cohort '08 had access to one of these devices.

Possession of a mobile phone increased markedly from 44 per cent for Cohort '98 to 54 per cent for Cohort '08. Table 4.5 indicates that this shift is not due to changes in the profile of children or their parents over time. Mobile phone ownership is found to be more common among girls, children of parents with lower levels of education and those from lone-parent families, and less common in the highest-income group. Levels of ownership are higher in urban areas and among those living in rented accommodation but are lower in large families. It is slightly more common among 9-year-olds whose parents were born outside Ireland but somewhat less common where the child was born outside Ireland.

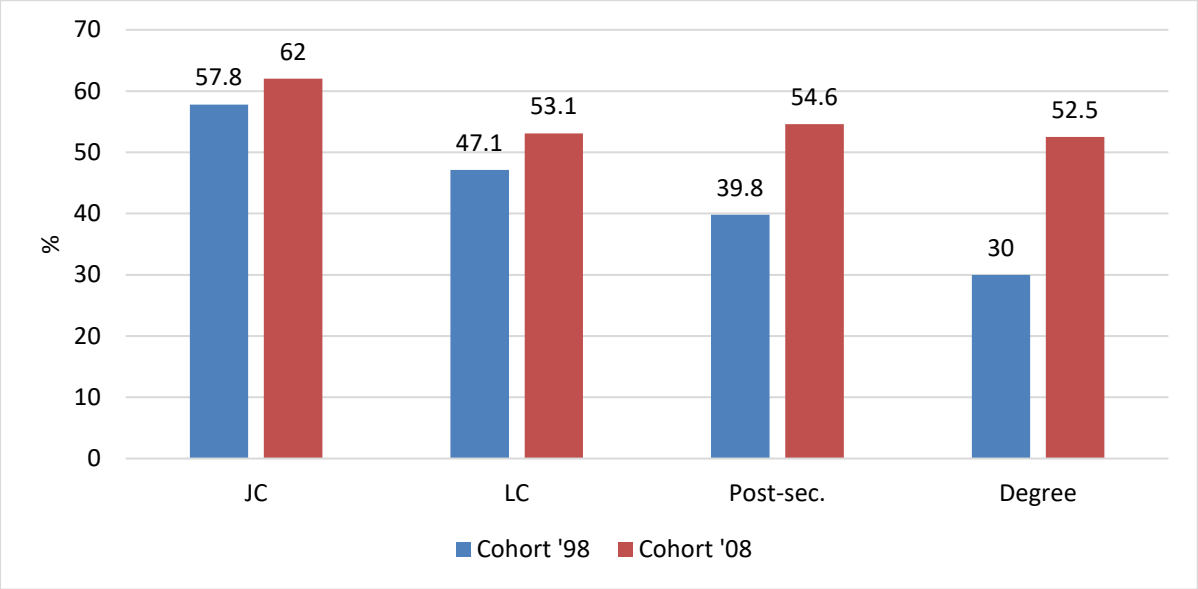
TABLE 4.5 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF WHETHER THE 9-YEAR-OLD HAS A MOBILE PHONE (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	0.776***	0.881***	0.924	0.877
Cohort '08	1.533***	1.665***	1.271*	1.548***
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		1.283***	1.378***	1.388***
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		0.740***	0.754***	0.751***
Post-secondary		0.619***	0.658***	0.658***
Degree		0.532***	0.394***	0.545***
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		0.930	0.912	0.655***
Managerial		0.916	0.897+	0.783**
Other non-manual		1.040	1.019	1.049
Skilled manual		0.957	0.946	1.059
Non-employed		0.938	0.940	0.891
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		1.029	1.043	1.085
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		1.142*	1.140*	1.163*
Child born outside Ireland		0.762***	0.799**	0.763***
Lone-parent family		1.312***	1.321***	1.312***
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Large family		0.753***	0.760***	0.753***
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		1.040	1.041	1.041
Urban location		1.255***	1.253***	1.255***
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		1.405***	1.425***	1.421***
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			0.849*	0.847*
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			0.922	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			1.440**	
Degree*Cohort '08			2.077***	
Professional*Cohort '08				1.856***
Managerial*Cohort '08				1.396**
Non-manual*Cohort '08				0.981
Skilled*Cohort '08				0.781+
Non-employed*Cohort '08				1.112
Strain*Cohort '08				0.921
Nagelkerke R^2	0.015	0.070	0.077	0.075
N	16,045			

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

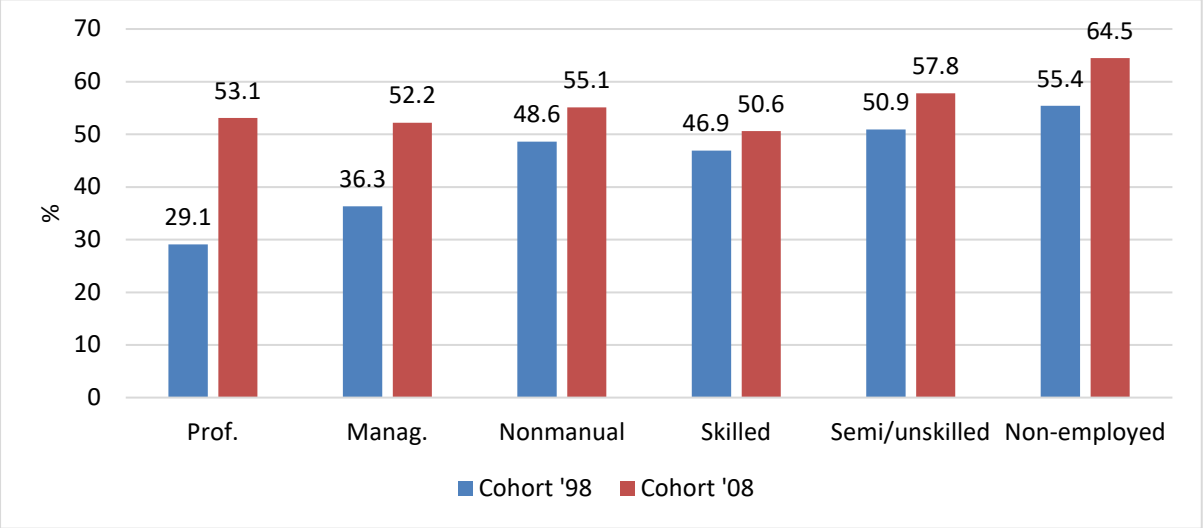
Looking at patterns of change over time, it appears that differences by gender and family background reduce over time. Both girls and children from more disadvantaged families in Cohort '98 tended to be 'early adopters' (see also Dempsey et al., 2019) but gender differences narrowed among 9-year-olds in Cohort '08. Similarly, growth in mobile phone ownership is greater in families where parents have post-secondary or tertiary qualifications, thus narrowing the educational gradient in possession (Figure 4.8). Similar patterns are found when differentiation by social class and household income are examined (Figures 4.9 and 4.10). Increases in mobile phone ownership are more modest for the manual and never-employed groups but much more marked for 9-year-olds from professional or managerial households. In keeping with this pattern, increases in mobile phone possession are larger among children from the higher income quintile than among those with the lowest income levels.

FIGURE 4.8 PREDICTED PROPORTION OF 9-YEAR-OLDS WITH MOBILE PHONES IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 BY PARENTAL EDUCATION



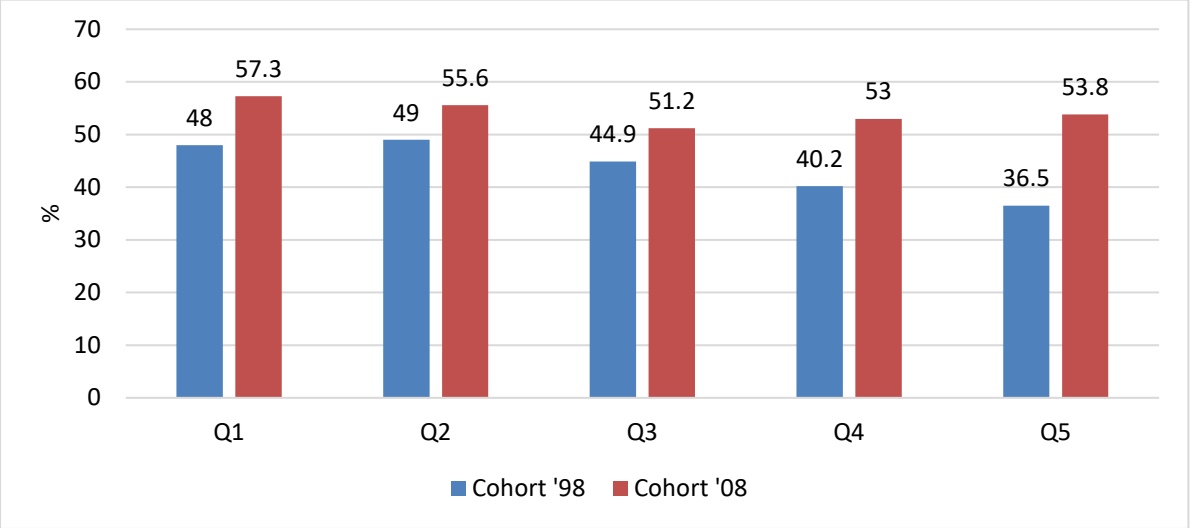
Source: Calculated from Table 4.5.

FIGURE 4.9 PREDICTED PROPORTION OF 9-YEAR-OLDS WITH MOBILE PHONES IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 BY SOCIAL CLASS



Source: Calculated from Table 4.5.

FIGURE 4.10 PREDICTED PROPORTION OF 9-YEAR-OLDS WITH MOBILE PHONES IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME



Source: Calculated from Table 4.5.

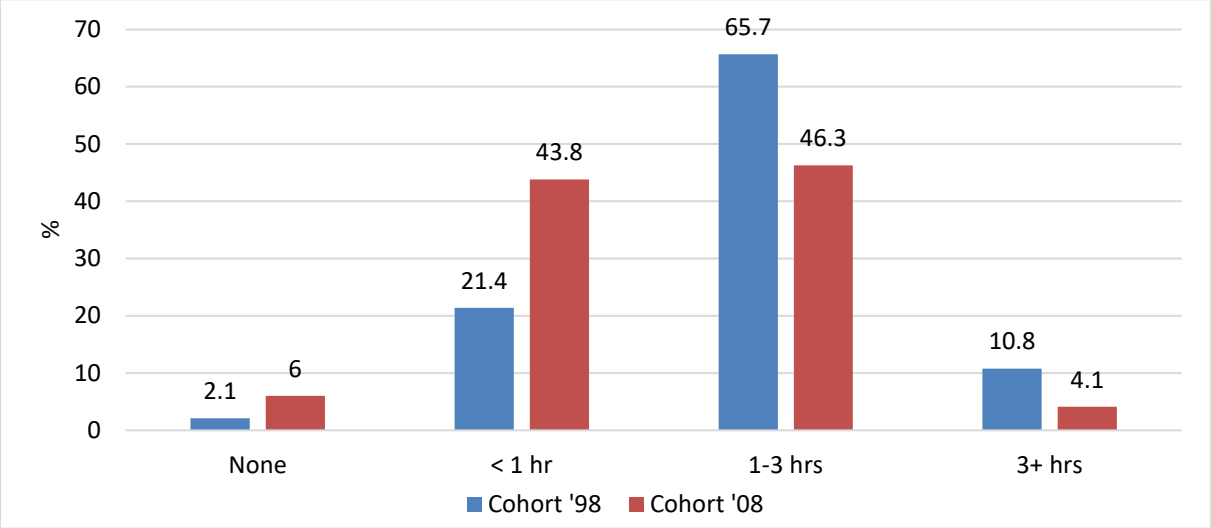
4.4.1 Screentime based on survey reports

In both waves, mothers were asked how long their children spent watching television and how long they spent on computers/other screens on a weekday[16] (during term-time). It should be noted that the question for Cohort '08 referred to watching TV programmes/DVDs 'from any source' (including streamed) so the estimates were not limited to using traditional television sets. As discussed in Chapter 1, the response categories were quite aggregated. As a result, the largest

[16] Cohort '08 was also asked about screentime on a weekend day; much more time was spent by 9-year-olds watching TV and using other devices at the weekend than during the week (McNamara et al., 2020).

group fell into the more than an hour but less than three hours category – 66 per cent for Cohort '98 and 46 per cent for Cohort '08. As is apparent from Table 4.11, there was a marked reduction in the amount of time spent watching TV over the decade, with around half of 9-year-olds from Cohort '08 watching less than an hour on a weekday.

FIGURE 4.11 AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WATCHING TELEVISION/DVDS ON A WEEKDAY FOR 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.

The models in Table 4.6 focus on the factors predicting watching a lot of TV, that is three or more hours on a weekday. The change between cohorts holds even when shifts in the characteristics of children and their families are taken into account (compare Models 1 and 2). Substantial TV time does not vary by gender but is less common among children of parents with post-secondary or tertiary education and those from professional backgrounds as well as those from managerial or skilled manual classes. Interestingly, children from non-employed households spend slightly less time watching TV than those on semi/unskilled manual backgrounds. Children from the highest-income group are less likely than others to watch a lot of TV. Longer TV time is slightly more common among children in rented accommodation but does not differ by child disability, migrant background, family size or structure, or living in an urban area.

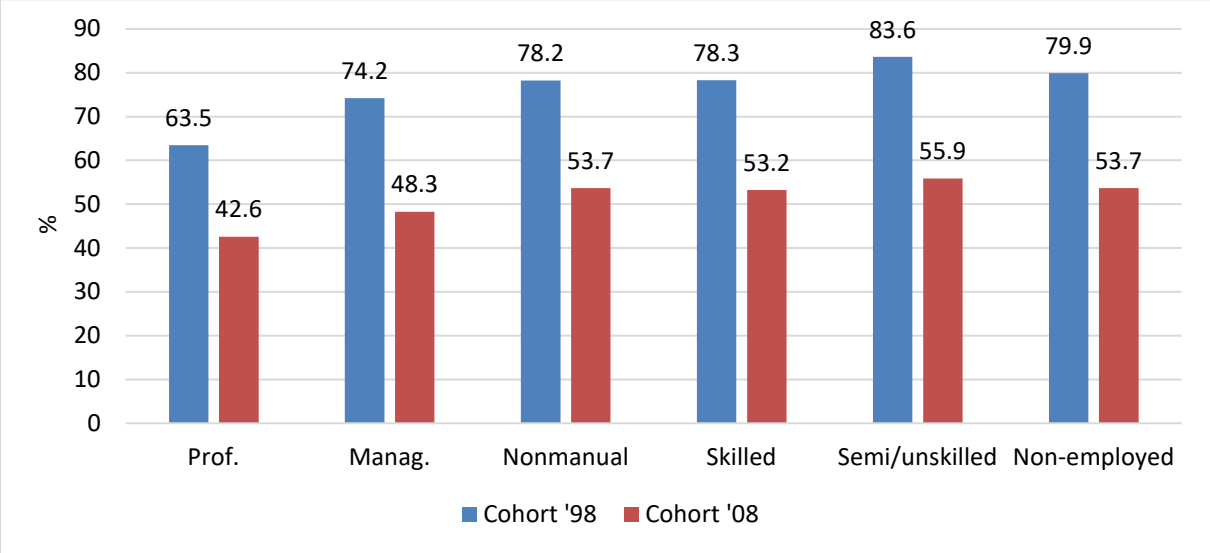
TABLE 4.6 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF WHETHER THE 9-YEAR-OLD SPENDS THREE HOURS OR MORE WATCHING TELEVISION (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	3.253***	4.600***	4.456***	5.292***
Cohort '08	0.313***	0.340***	0.376***	0.262***
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		1.016	1.003	0.991
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		0.993	1.036	1.011
Post-secondary		0.825**	0.896	0.843**
Degree		0.578***	0.605***	0.586***
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		0.694***	0.690***	0.527***
Managerial		0.861*	0.857*	0.730**
Other non-manual		0.893	0.891	0.750**
Skilled manual		0.847*	0.844*	0.738**
Non-employed		0.915*	0.808*	0.739*
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		1.075	1.074	1.263*
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		0.941	0.942	0.945
Child born outside Ireland		0.910	0.906	0.908
Lone-parent family		1.020	1.021	1.014
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Large family		1.022	1.022	1.020
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		1.039	1.041	1.043
Urban location		0.942	0.943	0.938+
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		1.107*	1.107*	1.116*
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			1.028	1.040
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			0.891	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			0.842	
Degree*Cohort '08			0.889	
Professional*Cohort '08				1.594**
Managerial*Cohort '08				1.327*
Non-manual*Cohort '08				1.349*
Skilled*Cohort '08				1.258
Non-employed*Cohort '08				1.155
Strain*Cohort '08				0.921
Nagelkerke R^2	0.098	0.121	0.121	0.122
N		16,042		

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

There is no change in patterns by gender, parental education or income over time. However, there is some change in social class differentiation (Table 4.6, Model 4 and Figure 4.12). The reduction in TV watching was somewhat less among the professional, managerial and non-manual groups than among manual or non-employed groups but a difference by social class still remains for Cohort '08.

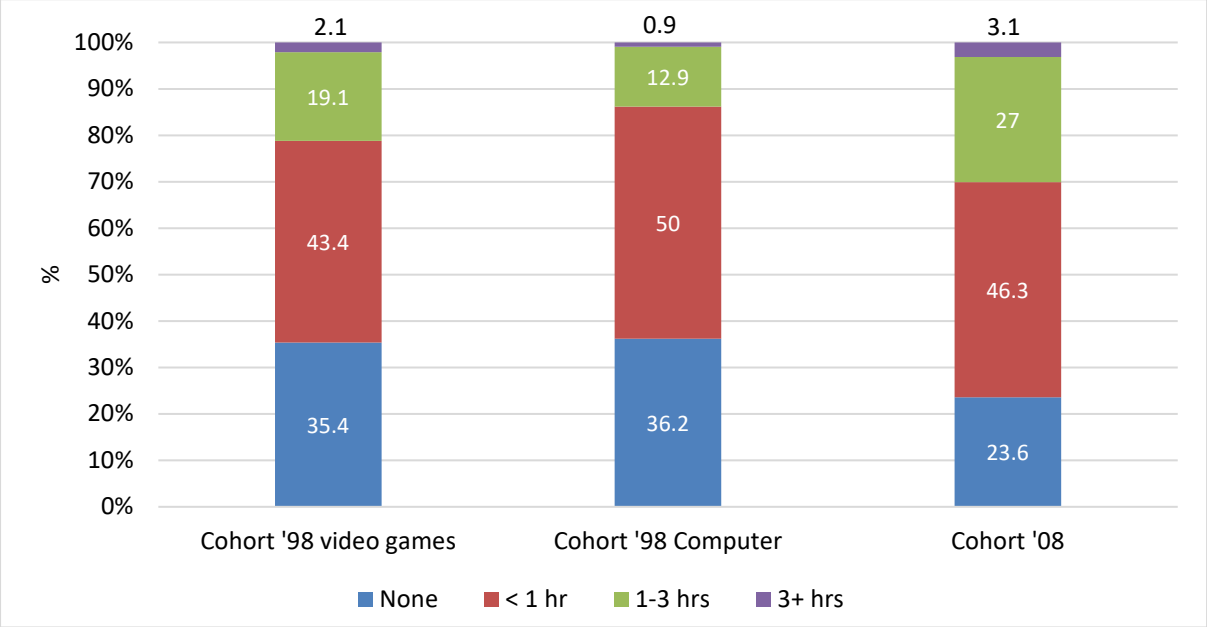
FIGURE 4.12 PREDICTED PROPORTION OF 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 WATCHING TV FOR THREE OR MORE HOURS BY PARENTAL SOCIAL CLASS



Source: Calculated from Table 4.6.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the measure of non-TV screentime differed between cohorts, reflecting the change in the nature of screentime. For Cohort '98, mothers were asked about time spent 'using the computer' but were also asked separately about time spent 'playing video games'. For Cohort '08, mothers were asked about time spent on 'any other screen-based activity' (not TV programmes). The largest percentage fell into the more than one but less than three hours group for videogaming and computer time among Cohort '98 and other screentime among Cohort '08 (Figure 4.13). For Cohort '98, 26 per cent of 9-year-olds had no time on computers or video games; the comparable figure for no other screentime among Cohort '08 is only slightly lower at 24 per cent. Because of the lack of comparability over time, the following subsection uses time-use diary data to look at the different components of, and total, screentime.

FIGURE 4.13 AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT USING A COMPUTER/OTHER SCREEN ON A WEEKDAY FOR 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08, ALSO SHOWING TIME PLAYING VIDEO GAMES FOR COHORT '98



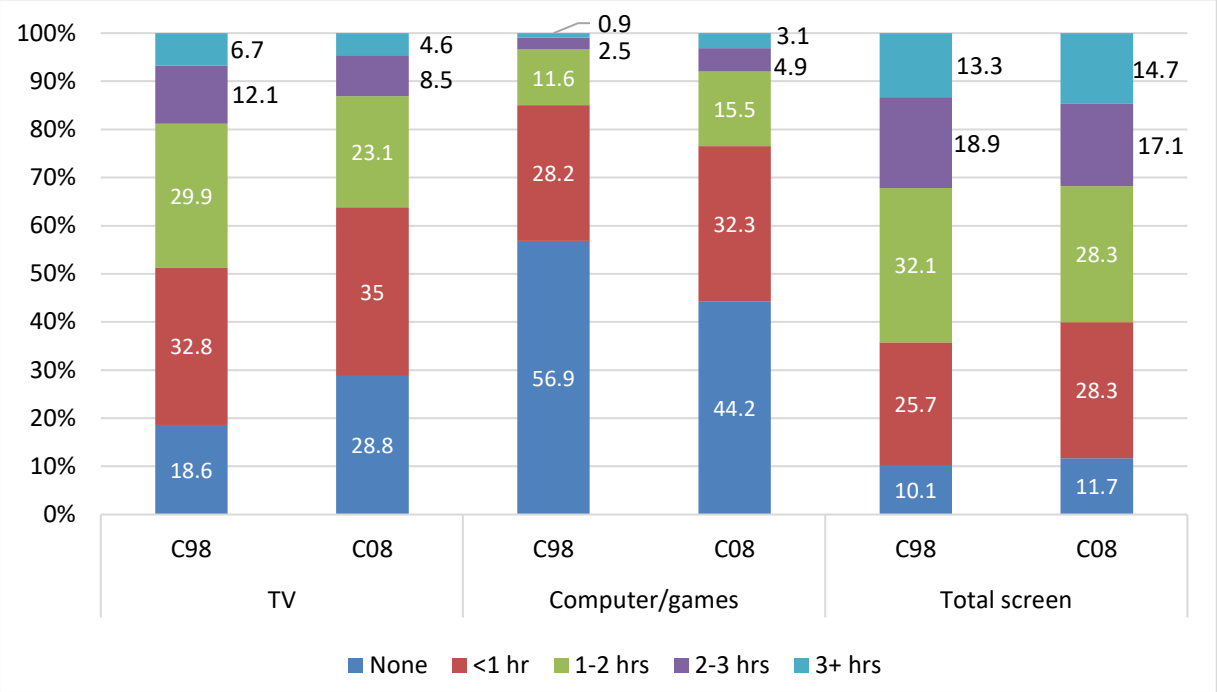
Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.

4.4.2 Screentime using time-use diary data

Time-use diaries are more directly comparable across cohorts than the survey information on screentime. The measures used here focus on; time spent watching television/DVDs/videos; time spent on the computer or games device plus time spent messaging on a phone; and a total measure of screentime comprising all of the above.

In keeping with the parental survey reports, time spent watching TV decreases markedly, with the proportion watching no TV increasing from 19 to 29 per cent (Figure 4.14). In contrast, there is an increase between cohorts in the time spent using a computer/games device or messaging on a phone, with the proportion spending an hour or more on these activities increasing from 15 to 24 per cent. Interestingly, total screentime did not change markedly between cohorts, indicating a shift in the type of screen use (from TV to computers/devices) rather than the total amount of time.

FIGURE 4.14 AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WATCHING TV, USING A COMPUTER/DEVICE/OTHER SCREEN AND TOTAL SCREENTIME FOR 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.

Table 4.7 looks at the factors associated with spending time watching television, using the same categories employed in Figure 4.14. There is a significant decline in TV time between cohorts, a pattern that is not explained by changes in the profile of children and their families (Models 1 and 2). Not surprisingly, nine-year-olds watch less TV during the week and during term-time (Model 1). There is very little systematic variation by child or family characteristics in time spent watching TV (Table 4.7 and A4.3). However, there appears to be some shift between cohorts, with children from more advantaged families (in terms of social class and parental education) watching relatively more TV in Cohort '08 than in Cohort '98.

Table 4.8 shows a significant increase over time in time spent using a computer or games device or messaging using a phone. Like TV time, computer time is reduced during the week and during term-time. Other screentime is highly gendered, being much longer among boys than girls. In contrast to TV time, time spent using other screens is more socially differentiated, being longer for those from lone-parent and migrant families and those living in rented accommodation and shorter in graduate families. It is also more prevalent in urban areas. The gender difference in computer time does not differ between cohorts but there is some evidence of less of an increase between cohorts among more advantaged groups (in terms of parental education, social class and, to some extent, income).

Table 4.9 uses a total measure of screentime, comprising TV time and time on other screens. There is, if anything, a slight decline in total screentime between cohorts in the model. However, it is probably more accurate to say there is no overall change (see Figure 4.14 and the model specification with income rather than education and class in Table A4.3). Overall screentime is higher for boys, those in rented accommodation and those living in urban areas while it is lower for those from graduate families. The gender gap in total screentime widens over time while there is little systematic variation in patterns of change by family background.

TABLE 4.7 ORDINAL LOGIT MODELS OF TIME SPENT WATCHING TELEVISION (WITH CATEGORIES OF NONE, <1 HOUR, 1-2 HOURS, 2-3 HOURS AND 3+ HOURS), TIME-USE DIARY DATA (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Cohort '08	0.533***	0.530***	0.351***	0.327***
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Weekday	0.332***	0.332***	0.332***	0.332***
Term-time	0.643***	0.641***	0.637***	0.645***
Female		1.012	0.987	0.979
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		1.005	0.925	1.031
Post-secondary		1.028	0.930	1.047
Degree		1.048	0.889	1.055
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		1.081	1.078	0.844
Managerial		1.039	1.038	0.839+
Other non-manual		1.217**	1.211**	0.868
Skilled manual		1.028	1.030	0.861
Non-employed		1.123	1.131	1.019
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		0.975	0.980	1.000
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		0.906	0.910	0.913
Lone-parent family		0.901	0.901	0.896+
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Disability/illness		0.928	0.933	0.935
Urban location		0.991	0.985	0.985
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		1.013	1.015	1.027
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			1.043	1.057
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			1.425*	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			1.494**	
Degree*Cohort '08			1.667***	
Professional*Cohort '08				1.716***
Managerial*Cohort '08				1.633***
Non-manual*Cohort '08				2.120***
Skilled*Cohort '08				1.496**
Non-employed*Cohort '08				1.225
Strain*Cohort '08				0.966
N		9,745		

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10. Numbers are smaller in this and other tables reporting time-use data because of lower completion rates of the diaries compared to the main survey (see Chapter 1).

TABLE 4.8 ORDINAL LOGIT MODELS OF TIME SPENT USING A COMPUTER/GAMES DEVICE/ MESSAGING ON PHONE (WITH CATEGORIES OF NONE, <1 HOUR, 1-2 HOURS, 2-3 HOURS AND 3+ HOURS), USING TIME-USE DIARY DATA (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Cohort '08	1.611***	1.777***	2.291***	2.266***
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Weekday	0.549***	0.554***	0.554***	0.555***
Term-time	0.655***	0.641***	0.642***	0.640***
Female		0.476***	0.504***	0.501***
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		0.995	0.973	0.980
Post-secondary		0.942	0.977	0.919
Degree		0.794**	0.968	0.789**
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		0.868	0.891	1.072
Managerial		0.892	0.911	1.028
Other non-manual		1.016	1.042	1.176
Skilled manual		0.983	1.000	0.988
Non-employed		1.118	1.137	1.243+
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		0.825**	0.813**	0.736*
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		1.217**	1.205**	1.202*
Lone-parent family		1.150*	1.143*	1.143*
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Disability/illness		1.095+	1.085	1.088
Urban location		1.227***	1.237***	1.234***
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		1.151*	1.139*	1.140*
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			0.912	0.911
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			1.107	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			0.717	
Degree*Cohort '08			0.640**	
Professional*Cohort '08				0.689*
Managerial*Cohort '08				0.755*
Non-manual*Cohort '08				0.748+
Skilled*Cohort '08				1.009
Non-employed*Cohort '08				0.834
Strain*Cohort '08				1.178
N		9,745		

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

TABLE 4.9 ORDINAL LOGIT MODELS OF TOTAL SCREENTIME (WITH CATEGORIES OF NONE, <1 HOUR, 1-2 HOURS, 2-3 HOURS AND 3+ HOURS), USING TIME-USE DIARY DATA (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Cohort '08	0.802***	0.846***	0.778*	0.774*
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Weekday	0.264***	0.255***	0.257***	0.257***
Term-time	0.489***	0.487***	0.485***	0.487***
Female		0.635***	0.706***	0.701***
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		0.917	0.854*	0.927
Post-secondary		0.891+	0.819*	0.893+
Degree		0.826**	0.826*	0.829**
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		0.933	0.946	0.903
Managerial		0.947	0.959	0.889
Other non-manual		1.162*	1.176*	0.962
Skilled manual		0.929	0.939	0.844+
Non-employed		1.128	1.144	1.062
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		0.941	0.938	0.973
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		1.091	1.083	1.088
Lone-parent family		0.936	0.934	0.937
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Disability/illness		0.977	0.971	0.974
Urban location		1.117**	1.119**	1.119**
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		1.166**	1.160**	1.170**
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			0.808**	0.813**
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			1.371*	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			1.291+	
Degree*Cohort '08			1.131	
Professional*Cohort '08				1.133
Managerial*Cohort '08				1.174
Non-manual*Cohort '08				1.538**
Skilled*Cohort '08				1.254
Non-employed*Cohort '08				1.135
Strain*Cohort '08				0.941
N		9,745		

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

4.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has examined the friendship networks of 9-year-olds as well as their engagement in sport, play and screentime. Children most commonly have two or three close friends, though the proportion having large friendship groups of six or more increases over time from 17 to 25 per cent. There is no obvious explanation for this increase. It appears unlikely that it reflects online contact with a larger group of peers among the younger cohort since children with larger peer groups tend to have more face-to-face contact with them (analyses not shown here). Nine-year-olds typically see their friends outside school two or three days per week, though around a quarter see them almost every day. Children see their friends more often where they come from lone-parent or lower-educated families. There are challenges around inclusion with children with disabilities/SEN and those from migrant backgrounds having smaller friendship groups and seeing their friends less often.

Engagement in general play (playing with toys or make-believe games) does not change over time. It is more common among girls than boys and among the most and least advantaged groups – being associated with higher parental education but also experience of financial strain. The proportion of 9-year-olds reported engaging in sport almost every day declines over time from 44 to 34 per cent. This pattern is confirmed by mothers' reports of the frequency with which the child engaged in hard or light exercise in the previous fortnight. Sports participation among girls remains markedly lower than among boys over time while there is evidence of an increasing social gradient in sports engagement (in favour of more advantaged groups).

The decade between the cohorts was one of increased digitalisation of day-to-day lives. GUI survey questions were adapted to better capture this change, making it challenging to compare like with like in measuring screentime. However, time-use data do make it possible to look at changes over time. There is increased mobile phone ownership over time; for Cohort '98, girls and more disadvantaged groups were 'early adopters' while these gender and social background differences in possession decrease over time. Overall screentime (at least as a main activity) does not change markedly, though there is a dramatic shift away from television watching towards spending more time on other devices. Total screentime is lower for girls than boys and among children from graduate families.

TABLE A4.1 SENSITIVITY ANALYSES OF PEER GROUP AND ACTIVITIES TO INCLUDE HOUSEHOLD INCOME QUINTILE (ODDS RATIOS)

Text	No. of friends	Sees friends frequently	Daily sports/exercise
Cohort '08	1.483***	0.805*	0.438***
(Ref. Cohort '98)			
Household income quintile:			
Quintile 2	0.907	0.805**	0.967
Quintile 3	0.978	0.751**	0.889
Quintile 4	1.014	0.714***	0.792**
Quintile 5	0.944	0.694***	0.959
Income missing	0.895	0.761*	0.972
(Ref. Lowest quintile)			
Quintile 2*Cohort '08	0.959	1.094	1.197
Quintile 3*Cohort '08	0.893	1.067	1.536***
Quintile 4*Cohort '08	0.925	0.969	1.986***
Quintile 5*Cohort '08	1.128	1.004	1.846***
Income missing*Cohort '08	1.150	0.890	1.432*
Nagelkerke R^2	n.a.	0.093	0.093
N	16,123	16,039	15,885

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10. The models also control for gender, family structure, family size, migrant status, urban/rural location and housing tenure.

TABLE A4.2 SENSITIVITY ANALYSES OF MOBILE PHONE OWNERSHIP AND TV TIME TO INCLUDE HOUSEHOLD INCOME QUINTILE (ODDS RATIOS)

Text	Has mobile phone	3+ hours TV
Constant	0.571***	3.897***
Cohort '08	1.514***	0.279***
(Ref. Cohort '98)		
Household income quintile:		
Quintile 2	1.194*	1.069
Quintile 3	1.061	0.863
Quintile 4	0.887	0.858+
Quintile 5	0.785**	0.622***
Income missing	0.982	0.722**
(Ref. Lowest quintile)		
Quintile 2*Cohort '08	0.879	1.021
Quintile 3*Cohort '08	0.879	1.152
Quintile 4*Cohort '08	1.193	0.997
Quintile 5*Cohort '08	1.376**	1.091
Income missing*Cohort '08	1.124	1.386
Nagelkerke R^2	0.051	0.111
N	16,045	16,042

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10. The models also control for gender, family structure, family size, migrant status, urban/rural location and housing tenure.

TABLE A4.3 SENSITIVITY ANALYSES OF SCREENTIME (TIME-USE DIARY) TO INCLUDE HOUSEHOLD INCOME QUINTILE (ODDS RATIOS)

Text	TV time	Other screentime	Total screentime
Cohort '08	0.441***	2.404***	0.903
(Ref. Cohort '98)			
Household income quintile:			
Quintile 2	0.978	1.305**	1.067
Quintile 3	0.938	1.370**	0.961
Quintile 4	0.851+	1.400**	0.933
Quintile 5	0.857+	1.343**	0.936
Income missing	0.639***	1.128	0.782+
(Ref. Lowest quintile)			
Quintile 2*Cohort '08	0.979	0.772+	0.879
Quintile 3*Cohort '08	1.387*	0.683**	1.211
Quintile 4*Cohort '08	1.198	0.625**	0.970
Quintile 5*Cohort '08	1.273+	0.643**	0.953
Income missing*Cohort '08	1.509*	0.675**	1.003
N	7,945	7,945	7,945

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10. The models also control for gender, family structure, family size, migrant status, urban/rural location and housing tenure.

CHAPTER 5
Formal and informal learning

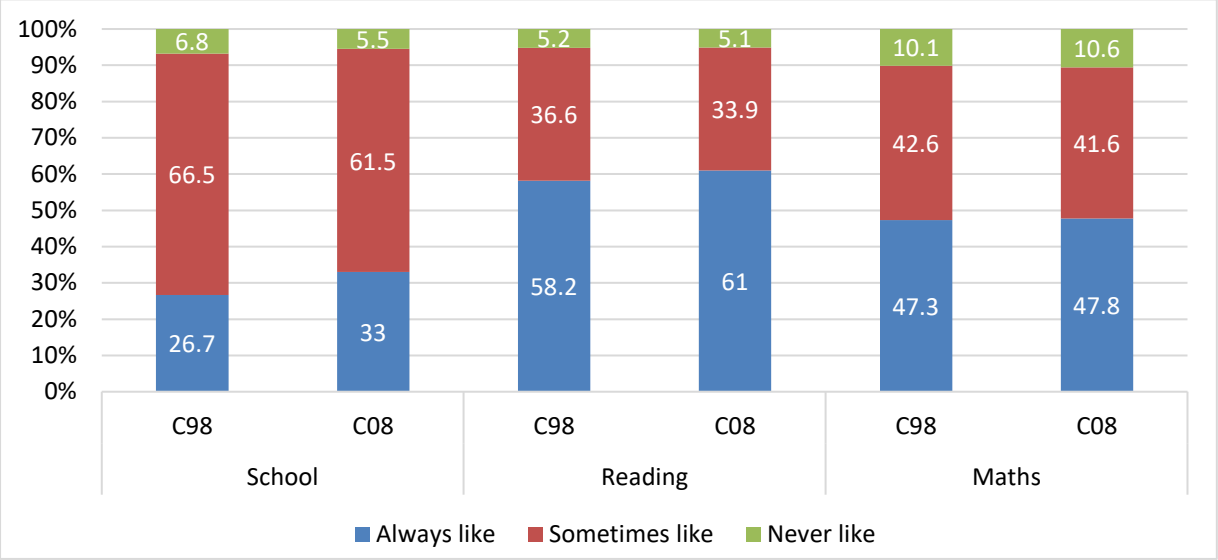
5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at potential changes in 9-year-olds' experiences of both formal and informal learning. For the purposes of these analyses, formal learning refers to experiences within school while informal learning refers to activities outside school that are likely to promote cognitive (and broader skill) development. The chapter examines children's attitudes to school in general as well as their attitudes to reading and Maths. Previous research has indicated the importance of out-of-school cultural activities in shaping in-school learning (Smyth, 2020). The chapter therefore also looks at the frequency of reading for pleasure and at participation in structured cultural activities such as music and drama classes or clubs.

5.2 ATTITUDES TO SCHOOL AND SCHOOL SUBJECTS

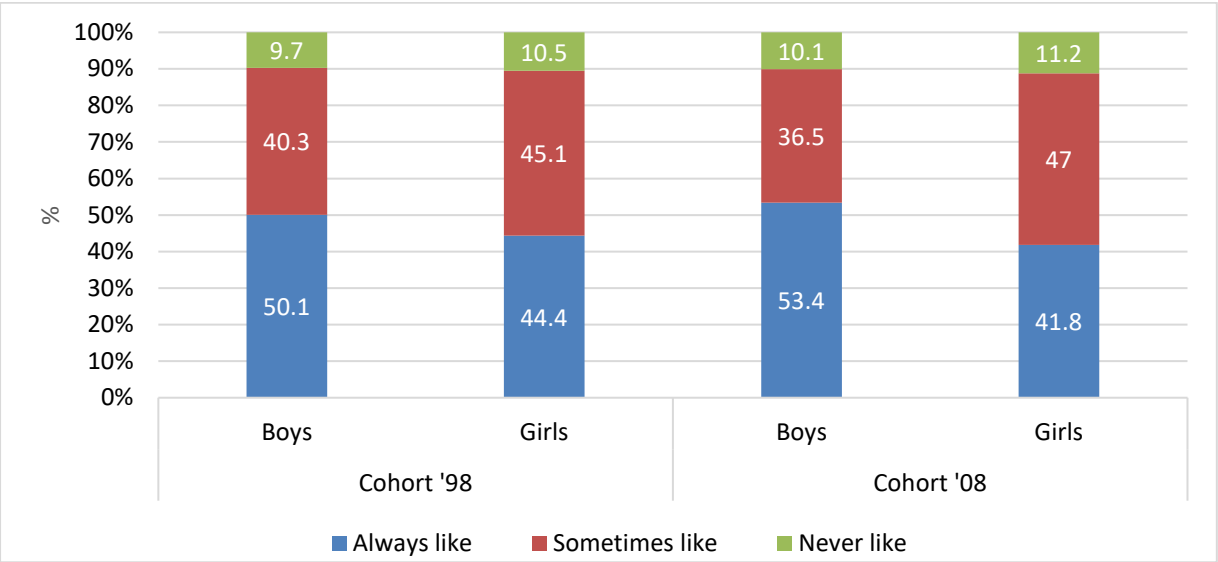
Figure 5.1 shows attitudes to school in general and to reading and Maths as school subjects among 9-year-olds in the two cohorts. There is relative stability over time in the small proportion of children who 'never' like school or these school subjects. Attitudes to reading are more positive than perceptions of Maths for both cohorts. There is a significant increase in the percentage of 9-year-olds who 'always' like school over time and a very slight increase in the numbers who 'always' like reading. There is no overall change in attitudes to Maths over this decade. However, an exploration of the pattern by gender reveals important differences (Figure 5.2); boys' attitudes became somewhat more positive while girls' attitudes became somewhat more negative, leading to greater gender differences in attitudes to Maths among Cohort '08.

FIGURE 5.1 ATTITUDES TO SCHOOL, READING AND MATHS AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.

FIGURE 5.2 ATTITUDES TO MATHS BY GENDER AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.

Table 5.1 shows that the increase in the proportion always liking school was not due to changes in the profile of children (compare Models 1 and 2). There is a very large gender gap, with girls twice as likely as boys to report always liking school. Interestingly, children whose parents have lower secondary education, are in semi/unskilled manual jobs, or live in rented accommodation are more likely to always like school than other groups. Migrant-origin children – whose parents were born outside Ireland or who themselves came to Ireland as a child – are more positive about school than their peers. Children from larger families are somewhat less positive about school than those from smaller families.

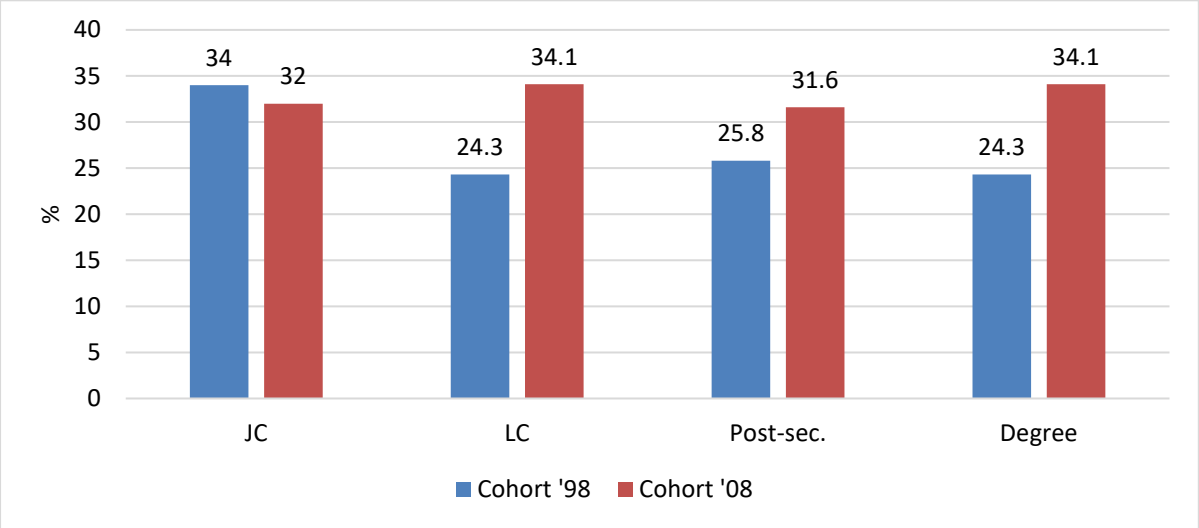
TABLE 5.1 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF WHETHER THE 9-YEAR-OLD REPORTS 'ALWAYS' LIKING SCHOOL (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	0.364***	0.336***	0.364***	0.325***
Cohort '08	1.349***	1.399***	1.003	1.451**
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		2.086***	2.140***	2.146***
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		0.744***	0.650***	0.754***
Post-secondary		0.779***	0.747***	0.794***
Degree		0.858*	0.694***	0.855*
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		0.764***	0.767**	0.764*
Managerial		0.785***	0.788***	0.718***
Other non-manual		0.870*	0.875*	0.869
Skilled manual		0.842*	0.851*	0.914
Non-employed		0.832**	0.852*	0.952
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		1.029	1.032	1.085
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		1.236**	1.232**	1.250**
Child born outside Ireland		1.303**	1.351***	1.301**
Lone-parent family		0.953	0.947	0.944
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Large family		0.906*	0.908*	0.909*
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		1.009	1.002	1.010
Urban location		1.019	1.014	1.019
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		1.104*	1.106*	1.111*
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			0.941	0.945
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			1.636***	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			1.326*	
Degree*Cohort '08			1.734***	
Professional*Cohort '08				1.017
Managerial*Cohort '08				1.198
Non-manual*Cohort '08				1.007
Skilled*Cohort '08				0.831
Non-employed*Cohort '08				0.724*
Strain*Cohort '08				0.921
Nagelkerke R^2	0.007	0.055	0.057	0.057
N	15,889			

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

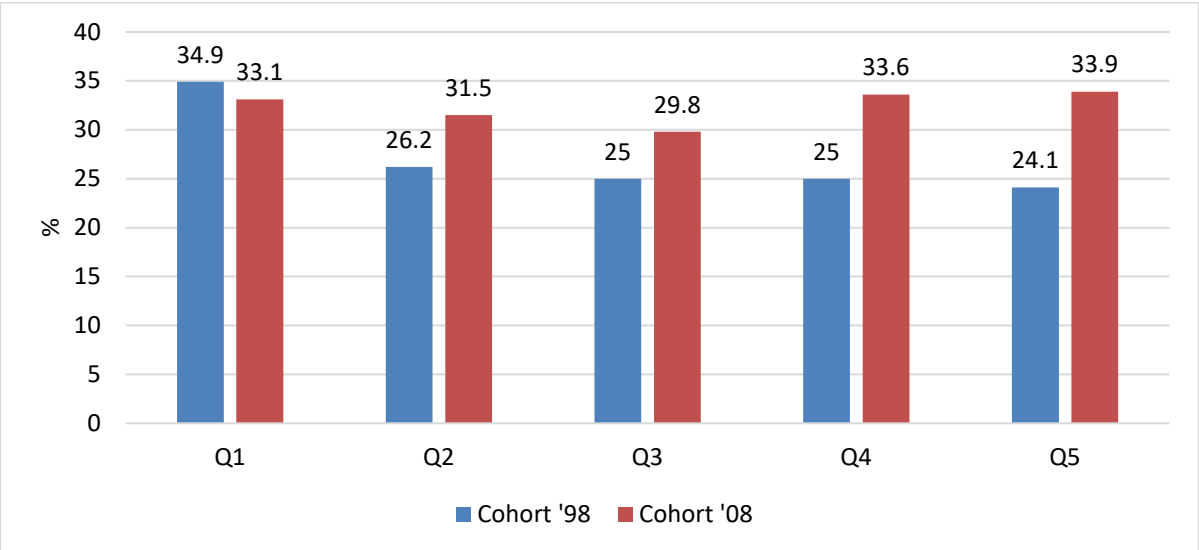
The gender gap in attitudes to school does not change over time. However, there is a shift in the pattern of attitudes by parental education, with a stability in views among those whose parents have lower secondary education, and more positive views over time among other educational groups (Figure 5.3). Overall, this results in a reduction in the variation by background. A similar pattern is found when changes by income are examined (Figure 5.4), with stability for the lowest income group and more positive attitudes among the other four income quintiles.

FIGURE 5.3 PREDICTED PERCENTAGE ALWAYS LIKING SCHOOL BY PARENTAL EDUCATION AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.

FIGURE 5.4 PREDICTED PERCENTAGE ALWAYS LIKING SCHOOL BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.

Table 5.2 shows that the slight increase between cohorts in the proportion liking reading (Figure 5.1) is, in fact, due to the changing composition of children and families. In other words, views are more positive because more children have parents with higher educational qualifications, a factor associated with more positive views on reading. As with attitudes to school, views of reading are more positive among girls than boys. Perceptions of reading are more positive among children whose parents have post-secondary or tertiary qualifications but also, somewhat surprisingly, where parents report financial strain. Views are somewhat more negative among children in larger families, though there is little systematic variation by other background factors, including social class and household income. No change over time is evident in the size of the gender or parental education gap.

TABLE 5.2 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF WHETHER THE 9-YEAR-OLD REPORTS 'ALWAYS' LIKING READING (AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT) (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	1.395***	0.947	0.992	1.029
Cohort '08	1.122***	1.045	0.921	0.862
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		1.653***	1.575***	1.579***
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		1.029	1.002	1.028
Post-secondary		1.157**	1.185*	1.170**
Degree		1.301***	1.207**	1.310***
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		1.119	1.113	1.002
Managerial		1.117+	1.111	1.033
Other non-manual		1.027	1.024	1.004
Skilled manual		1.007	1.006	0.958
Non-employed		0.977	0.977	0.848+
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		1.170**	1.174**	1.129
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		0.948	0.945	0.948
Child born outside Ireland		1.073	1.087	1.078
Lone-parent family		0.937	0.936	0.945
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Large family		0.895**	0.896**	0.894**
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		1.004	0.891	1.006
Urban location		1.060	1.058	1.059+
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		0.965	0.967	0.965
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			1.108	1.105
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			1.099	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			1.004	
Degree*Cohort '08			1.189	
Professional*Cohort '08				1.241
Managerial*Cohort '08				1.177
Non-manual*Cohort '08				1.041
Skilled*Cohort '08				1.108
Non-employed*Cohort '08				1.393*
Strain*Cohort '08				1.067
Nagelkerke R^2	0.001	0.028	0.029	0.029
N	15,890			

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

Table 5.3 shows more negative views of Maths among girls than boys. Children with disabilities/SEN are also less likely to always like Maths. There is little systematic variation by family background, with more negative views in families experiencing financial strain but slightly more positive attitudes among those living in rented accommodation and among those in larger families (though the latter difference is very modest in scale). There is no overall change in attitudes to Maths over time (see Figure 5.1) but there is, however, some shift in the extent to which attitudes vary by gender and social background. The gender gap in attitudes to Maths widens between cohorts (see Model 3 and Figure 5.2). In addition, attitudes become slightly more positive among those whose parents have higher educational attainment and among those from the highest income quintile (Tables 5.3 and A5.1).

TABLE 5.3 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF WHETHER THE 9-YEAR-OLD REPORTS 'ALWAYS' LIKING MATHS (AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT) (ODDS RATIOS)

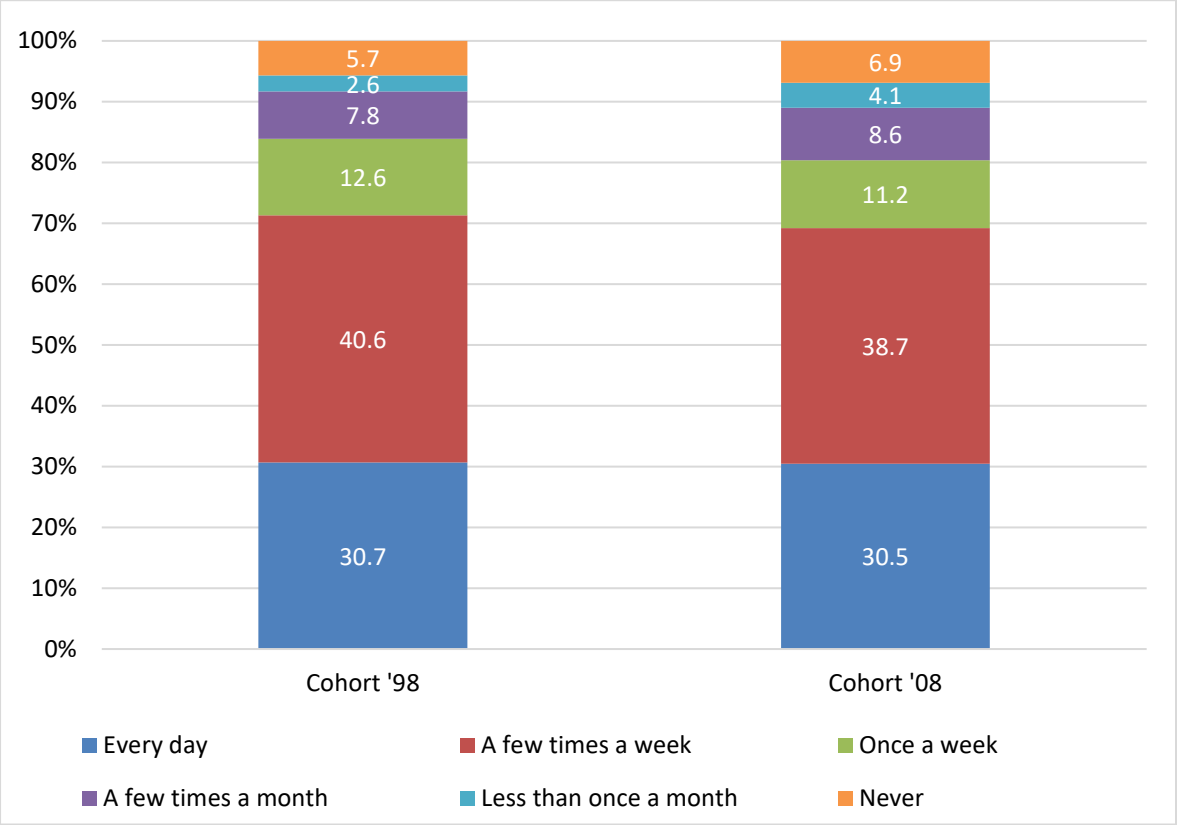
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	0.897***	1.065	1.075	1.027
Cohort '08	1.018	1.023	0.871	1.065
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		0.704***	0.786***	0.787***
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		0.879*	0.832**	0.894*
Post-secondary		0.998	0.919	1.020
Degree		1.005	0.872+	1.015
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		1.015	1.018	0.934
Managerial		0.977	0.979	0.893
Other non-manual		1.092	1.096	1.139
Skilled manual		1.054	1.062	0.960
Non-employed		1.135+	1.157+	1.329**
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		0.835**	0.837**	0.796**
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		1.018	1.018	1.023
Child born outside Ireland		1.017	1.039	1.012
Lone-parent family		0.969	0.966	0.952
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Large family		1.089*	1.093*	1.096*
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		0.863**	0.857***	0.856***
Urban location		0.984	0.982	0.985
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		1.129**	1.133**	1.133**
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			0.780***	0.782***
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			1.241+	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			1.360**	
Degree*Cohort '08			1.514***	
Professional*Cohort '08				1.184
Managerial*Cohort '08				1.218+
Non-manual*Cohort '08				0.920
Skilled*Cohort '08				1.254+
Non-employed*Cohort '08				0.695*
Strain*Cohort '08				1.067
Nagelkerke R^2	0.000	0.014	0.017	0.018
N		15,888		

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

5.3 CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

Two measures of cultural participation are examined in this section: the frequency of reading for pleasure and engagement in structured cultural activities (such as music and dance lessons). Table 5.5 shows that the largest group of 9-year-olds in both cohorts report reading 'for fun' a few times a week. The pattern remains relatively stable over time, though there is a slight increase in the percentage reading infrequently (less than once a week) from 20 to 16 per cent.

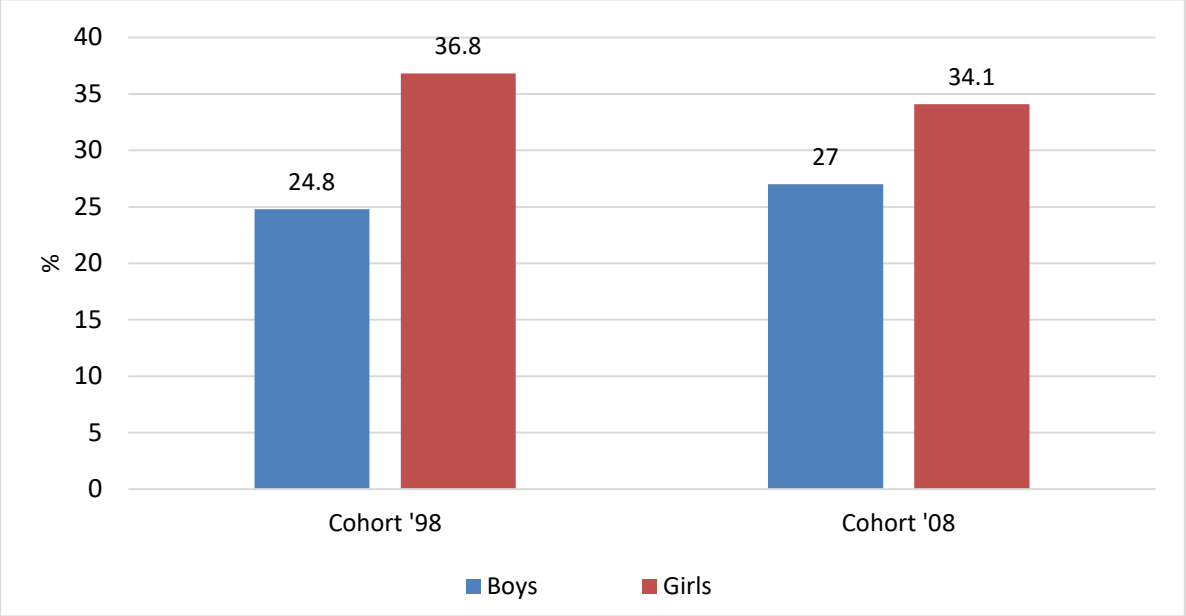
FIGURE 5.5 FREQUENCY OF READING FOR FUN AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 (REPORTED BY THE CHILD)



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.

The relative stability depicted in Figure 5.5 is less clear-cut when we examine trends in reading behaviour by gender. The gender gap in reading is found to narrow over time, reflecting a slight increase in reading every day for boys and a decrease for girls (Figure 5.6).

FIGURE 5.6 ACTUAL FREQUENCY OF READING FOR FUN EVERY DAY BY GENDER AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 (REPORTED BY THE CHILD)



Source: *Growing Up in Ireland*, Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: Change for boys is significant at the p<.05 level; change for girls is significant at the p<.01 level.

The picture becomes even more nuanced when we take account of the changing composition between cohorts (Model 2, Table 5.4). Controlling for increasing educational levels among parents, the proportion of children reading every day is actually lower for Cohort '08 than for Cohort '98. The likelihood of reading every day is strongly socially stratified, being more common where parents have post-secondary or tertiary qualifications, where they hold professional, managerial or non-manual jobs and where they are in the highest income group (Tables 5.4 and A5.2). Frequent reading is less common in lone-parent and larger families as well as in migrant-origin families. The interaction term for gender and cohort is consistent with the descriptive analyses in Figure 5.6, showing a slight narrowing of the gender gap in reading over time.

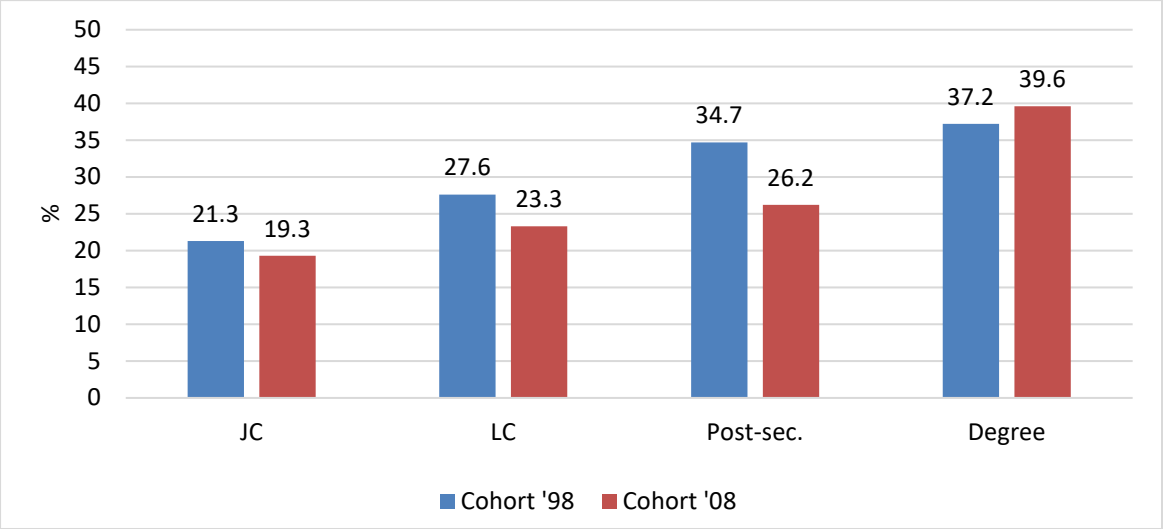
TABLE 5.4 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF WHETHER THE 9-YEAR-OLD READS FOR FUN EVERY DAY (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	0.443***	0.237***	0.225	0.251
Cohort '08	0.989	0.857***	0.899	0.671**
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		1.673***	1.891***	1.879***
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		1.117+	1.099	1.152*
Post-secondary		1.314***	1.524***	1.388***
Degree		1.792***	1.577***	1.853***
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		1.602***	1.582***	1.193
Managerial		1.362***	1.343***	1.107
Other non-manual		1.240**	1.236**	1.077
Skilled manual		1.138+	1.141+	1.011
Non-employed		1.178+	1.180+	1.037
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		0.968	0.971	1.083
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		0.803**	0.803**	0.814*
Child born outside Ireland		1.123	1.152+	1.120
Lone-parent family		0.804***	0.800***	0.798***
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Large family		0.815***	0.818***	0.813***
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		1.072	1.066	1.070
Urban location		0.965	0.964	0.962
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		0.940	0.944	0.947
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			0.767***	0.774***
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			1.107	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			0.852	
Degree*Cohort '08			1.360*	
Professional*Cohort '08				1.859***
Managerial*Cohort '08				1.621***
Non-manual*Cohort '08				1.412*
Skilled*Cohort '08				1.338+
Non-employed*Cohort '08				1.359+
Strain*Cohort '08				0.823
Nagelkerke R^2	0.000	0.052	0.056	0.056
N	15,882			

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

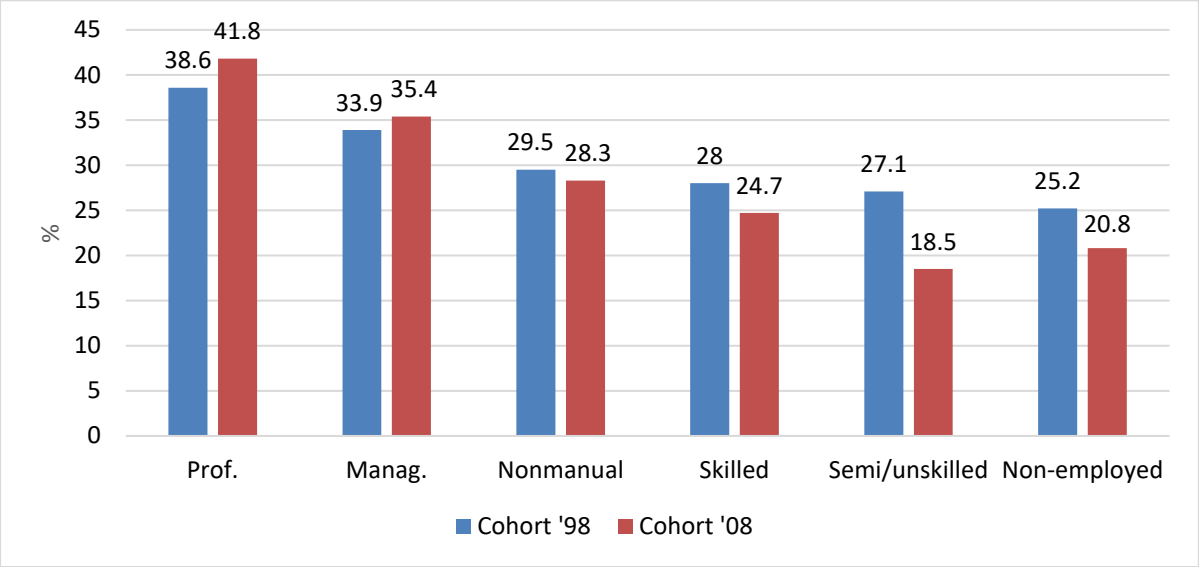
In terms of family background, there is evidence of a widening of the social gradient in reading frequency whether background is measured in terms of parental education, social class or household income (Figures 5.7 to 5.9). This reflects a slight increase in reading every day among more advantaged groups and a reduction in the frequency among the semi/unskilled manual and non-employed groups as well as those in the lowest income quintile.

FIGURE 5.7 PREDICTED PERCENTAGE OF READING FOR FUN EVERY DAY BY PARENTAL EDUCATION AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 (REPORTED BY THE CHILD)



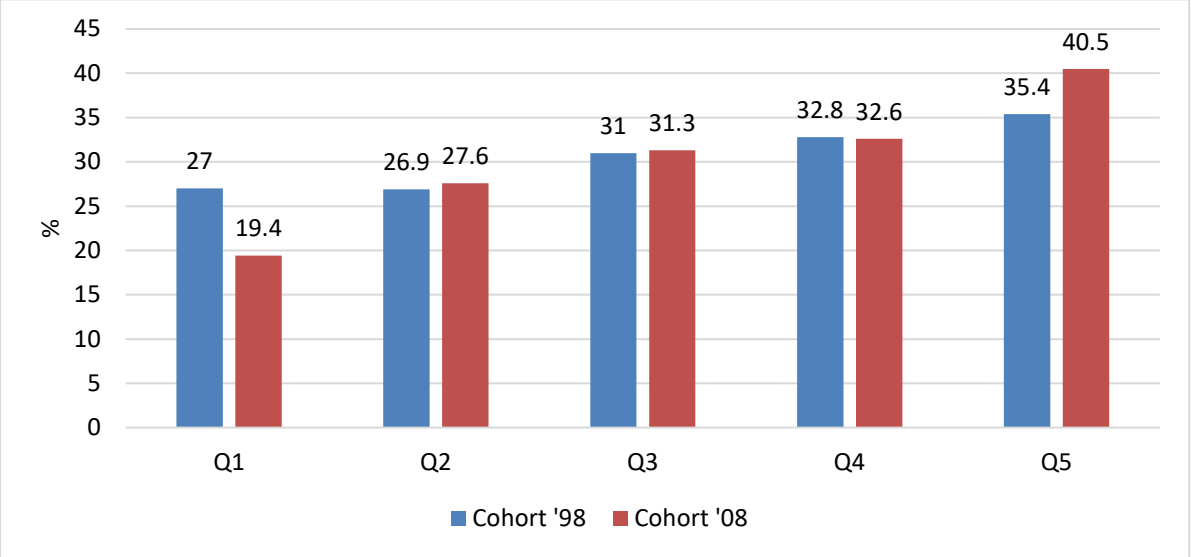
Source: Calculated from Table 5.4.

FIGURE 5.8 PREDICTED PERCENTAGE OF READING FOR FUN EVERY DAY BY SOCIAL CLASS AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 (REPORTED BY THE CHILD)



Source: Calculated from Table 5.4.

FIGURE 5.9 PREDICTED PERCENTAGE OF READING FOR FUN EVERY DAY BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME AMONG 9-YEAR-OLDS IN COHORTS '98 AND '08 (REPORTED BY THE CHILD)



Source: Calculated from Table 5.4.

There was a slight decline between cohorts in the proportion engaging in structured cultural activities, from 47 per cent to 44 per cent. However, this decline is larger when the increased educational profile of parents is taken into account (compare Models 1 and 2 in Table 5.5). Cultural participation is highly gendered, with girls more than five times more likely than comparable boys to be involved. There is also a strong social gradient, with participation most common among those with graduate parents and those whose parents are in professional or managerial jobs. Participation levels are lower among those living in rented accommodation, those in larger families and those with migrant-origin parents. The size of the gender gap does not change over time and there is relative stability in the social gradient, except for a slightly greater decline among those whose parents have Leaving Certificate qualifications only.

TABLE 5.5 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF WHETHER THE 9-YEAR-OLD IS INVOLVED IN STRUCTURED CULTURAL ACTIVITIES (ODDS RATIOS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	0.897***	0.219***	0.205	0.210
Cohort '08	0.861***	0.668***	0.858	0.741*
(Ref. Cohort '98)				
Female		5.076***	5.217***	5.212***
(Ref. Male)				
Parental education:				
Leaving Certificate		1.473***	1.599***	1.471***
Post-secondary		1.987***	2.125***	1.965***
Degree		3.372***	3.628***	3.375***
(Ref. Lower secondary)				
Social class:				
Professional		1.390***	1.380***	1.397***
Managerial		1.338***	1.328***	1.466***
Other non-manual		1.118	1.112	1.062
Skilled manual		1.225**	1.217**	1.271*
Non-employed		0.849+	0.839*	0.846
(Ref. Semi/unskilled manual)				
Experiencing financial strain		1.055	1.056	1.143
Parent(s) born outside Ireland		0.607***	0.608***	0.607***
Child born outside Ireland		1.132	1.122	1.130
Lone-parent family		1.010	1.013	1.010
(Ref. Two-parent family)				
Large family		0.857***	0.858***	0.853***
(Ref. 2 or fewer siblings)				
Disability/illness		1.033	1.036	1.034
Urban location		0.996	0.998	0.994
(Ref. Rural)				
Social/private rented tenure		0.686***	0.687***	0.686***
(Ref. Own with/without mortgage)				
Female*Cohort '08			0.951	0.947
Leaving Certificate*Cohort '08			0.716*	
Post-secondary*Cohort '08			0.789+	
Degree*Cohort '08			0.782*	
Professional*Cohort '08				0.971
Managerial*Cohort '08				0.825
Non-manual*Cohort '08				1.126
Skilled*Cohort '08				0.925
Non-employed*Cohort '08				1.009
Strain*Cohort '08				0.864
Nagelkerke R^2	0.002	0.236	0.237	0.237
N	16,045			

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10.

5.4 SCREENTIME AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Previous research has pointed to a displacement of some other activities by screentime (see, for example, Fomby et al., 2021). Might this account for the changes in children's out-of-school lives over the decade studied? The relationship between screentime (considering TV and other screentime separately) and three other activities (sports, reading and cultural participation) is explored in Table 5.6. Mobile phone ownership is also included in the models as a potential proxy for screentime as a secondary activity. A reduced set of controls is considered, made up of parental education, migrant status, urban location and timing of the time-use diary completion.

Longer time (two or more hours) spent watching TV is associated with reduced involvement in sports, reading and cultural participation. Any amount of other screentime appears to be related to less involvement in these three activities, though no simple linear effect is apparent. Mobile phone ownership is associated with less frequent reading and engagement in cultural activities but is not significantly related to sports participation. The decline in reading over time is found to be related to changes in TV watching, other screentime and mobile phone ownership. For sport and cultural participation, we see a reduction in involvement in participation between cohorts, even taking account of screentime. Therefore, it appears that digital engagement is not sufficient to explain changes in children's sports and cultural participation over the decade analysed. However, there is tentative evidence that screentime has played a role in the reduction in reading for fun found among those from non-graduate families.

TABLE 5.6 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TV, OTHER SCREENTIME AND MOBILE PHONE OWNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT IN SPORTS, READING AND STRUCTURED CULTURAL ACTIVITIES (ODDS RATIOS)

	Sports almost every day	Reading for fun daily	Engage in structured cultural activities
Cohort '08	0.677***	0.967	0.699***
(Ref. Cohort '98)			
Owns mobile phone	1.023	0.702***	0.891**
Time spent watching TV:			
< 1 hour	0.945	0.928	1.010
1-2 hours	0.943	0.902+	0.894+
2-3 hours	0.822*	0.791**	0.787**
3+ hours	0.721**	0.865	0.793*
(Ref.: None)			
Time spent using other screens:			
< 1 hour	0.852**	0.873**	0.897*
1-2 hours	0.766***	0.839*	0.812**
2-3 hours	0.515***	0.937	0.718**
3+ hours	0.807	0.623**	0.772
(Ref.: None)			
Nagelkerke R^2	0.090	0.061	0.232
N		11,051	

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10. These models control for gender, parental education, migrant origin, urban location and timing of time-use diary completion.

5.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has examined potential differences between cohorts in engagement in formal and informal learning. In terms of attitudes to school and school subjects, the proportion who reported liking school increased while attitudes to reading and Maths remained fairly stable over time. Girls are more positive than boys about school and reading, and less positive about Maths. Of concern is that the gender gap in Maths attitudes has widened over the decade, as a result of girls' attitudes becoming somewhat more negative and boys' attitudes more positive. There is also evidence that attitudes to Maths became more socially differentiated over time. These growing gender and social inequalities are of concern given the role of early Maths skills and attitudes in a smooth transition to second-level education, and in later engagement with Maths and science subjects (Smyth, 2016; Hannan and Smyth, 2021).

Nine-year-olds tend to read for fun a few days a week, but this differs markedly by gender and social background. While there is some evidence of a narrowing gender gap over time, a widening gap is evident by parental education. Participation in structured cultural activities declines between cohorts; it remains highly gendered

and differentiated by social background, though there is a slight narrowing of the latter gap over time.

There is some evidence that informal learning activities like reading and cultural activities as well as sports participation are being displaced by screen activities. Children read for fun less when they own a mobile phone and spend two or more hours watching TV or using a screen, and this pattern appears to account for the decline in reading among those in non-graduate families. Cultural participation is also less evident among those who own a mobile phone and spend more time on TV and other screens. Sports participation is related to less time on screens but not to mobile phone ownership. However, the decline over time in cultural and sports engagement is not explained by the shift in screen activities.

TABLE A5.1 SENSITIVITY ANALYSES OF ATTITUDES TO SCHOOL AND SCHOOL SUBJECTS TO INCLUDE HOUSEHOLD INCOME QUINTILE (ODDS RATIOS)

Text	Always likes school	Always likes reading	Always likes Maths
Constant	0.333***	1.098	1.129+
Cohort '08	0.990	1.156+	0.979
(Ref. Cohort '98)			
Household income quintile:			
Quintile 2	0.658***	1.008	0.832*
Quintile 3	0.647***	1.116	0.889
Quintile 4	0.638***	1.040	0.843*
Quintile 5	0.619***	1.110	0.822*
Income missing	0.548***	1.010	0.911
(Ref. Lowest quintile)			
Quintile 2*Cohort '08	1.379***	0.961	1.182
Quintile 3*Cohort '08	1.324*	0.798*	1.086
Quintile 4*Cohort '08	1.607***	0.847	1.287*
Quintile 5*Cohort '08	1.765***	1.010	1.501***
Income missing*Cohort '08	2.244***	1.053	1.105
Nagelkerke R^2	0.057	0.025	0.084
N	15,889	15,890	15,888

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10. The models also control for gender, family structure, family size, migrant status, urban/rural location and housing tenure.

TABLE A5.2 SENSITIVITY ANALYSES OF CULTURAL PARTICIPATION TO INCLUDE HOUSEHOLD INCOME QUINTILE (ODDS RATIOS)

Text	Reads every day	Cultural participation
Constant	0.329***	0.331***
Cohort '08	0.759**	0.741**
(Ref. Cohort '98)		
Household income quintile:		
Quintile 2	0.908	1.109
Quintile 3	1.098	1.406***
Quintile 4	1.147	1.658***
Quintile 5	1.292**	2.374***
Income missing	1.150	1.404**
(Ref. Lowest quintile)		
Quintile 2*Cohort '08	1.576***	1.037
Quintile 3*Cohort '08	1.494**	1.145
Quintile 4*Cohort '08	1.464***	1.290*
Quintile 5*Cohort '08	1.849***	1.156
Income missing*Cohort '08	1.483*	1.130
Nagelkerke R^2	0.041	0.025
N	15,882	15,890

Source: *Growing Up in Ireland* Cohorts '98 and '08.
Note: *** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10. The models also control for gender, family structure, family size, migrant status, urban/rural location and housing tenure.

CHAPTER 6
Conclusions and implications for policy

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This report takes advantage of the two-cohort nature of the *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI) study to explore changes in the lives of 9-year-olds surveyed a decade apart, 2007/08 and 2017/18. This decade was a period of considerable social and policy change. Cohort '08 were exposed to challenging economic circumstances in early childhood due to the Great Recession and associated austerity measures while Cohort '98 were born at a time of relatively high but declining unemployment rates. Ireland saw a period of significant inward migration, with Cohort '08 more likely to have parents from outside Ireland. Educational participation continued to expand, resulting in higher educational qualifications among the parents of Cohort '08 children. A marked increase was found in the proportion of mothers in the GUI sample reporting that their child had a long-standing illness or disability. Significant policy change saw the introduction of free early years provision and an expansion of parental leave entitlements as well as an increased focus on literacy and numeracy at primary level.

This study therefore seeks to examine how all of these changes have shaped the lives of 9-year-olds and the extent to which any such changes reflect the changing profile of families. The report covers several main domains of children's lives, including relationships with family and peers, day-to-day activities, and engagement in formal and informal learning. The analyses focus not only on overall change but on the extent to which differences by gender and social background have altered over time. This chapter outlines the main findings of the study and discusses the implications of the findings for policy development.

6.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The analyses point to significant changes across several domains of children's lives. Mothers and fathers of Cohort '08 report more closeness with their children than their counterparts in Cohort '98 but at the same time, mothers indicate more conflict with their 9-year-olds. In contrast, children themselves are less likely to report getting on very well with their parents, though the majority continue to do so. Furthermore, families are less likely to eat dinner together every day than a decade previously.

Nine-year-olds from Cohort '08 have a larger group of close friends than those from Cohort '98 (see Table 6.1 for a summary of the main patterns). They play sport much less frequently but engage in general play to the same extent. They are much more likely to have a mobile phone. At least during the week, there is a shift in the

nature of their screentime, away from watching television to using other digital devices. They are less involved in cultural pursuits (such as drama and music lessons) than previously, and tend to read less for pleasure (except for those in graduate families). There is some evidence that those who spend more time watching TV or using other devices read less and are less involved in cultural activities. Nine-year-olds are more positive about school in general but attitudes to Maths remain largely unchanged.

Very few changes in children's experiences and activities are solely related to the shift in profile of 9-year-olds and their families. Only the apparent increase in father-child conflict and apparent decrease in the frequency of seeing friends as well as more positive attitudes to reading as a school subject are due to changes in the characteristics of families. Overall, therefore, the changes in children's lives appear to reflect real shifts in activities and experiences over a relatively short period of time.

The report findings document the highly gendered nature of middle childhood. Parent-daughter relations are more positive and less conflictual while girls have smaller friendship groups and see their friends less often than their male counterparts. They are less likely to engage in sport and much more likely to read for fun, be involved in structured cultural activities and engage in general play. They also spend less time using digital devices than boys. They are more positive about school and reading as a school subject but less positive about Maths than boys. Only the frequency of eating together as a family and the amount of time spent watching TV do not vary by gender. What is notable too is the remarkable persistence of gender differences in children's lives over a decade of social change (see Mullan, 2019; 2020, for similar findings in the UK). There is a slight narrowing of the gender gap in the frequency of seeing friends, in mobile phone ownership and in reading for pleasure. However, gender differences widen in attitudes to Maths and in time spent on general play. All other differences in the lives of boys and girls remain unchanged.

The findings highlight important challenges to the full inclusion of children from migrant backgrounds and those with disabilities/SEN. Both groups have fewer friends and are less likely to see them outside school. While children from a migrant background are more positive about school, they are less likely to engage in the kinds of activities (such as reading and structured cultural activities) that can enhance in-school learning and are also less likely to take part in sports. Recent years have seen increasing awareness of SEN and greater investment in supports within and outside school. Further research could usefully draw on GUI data to try to disentangle the complex relationship between identification of need, provision of supports and (changes in) child outcomes.

TABLE 6.1 SUMMARY OF PATTERNS OF CHANGE IN CHILD EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES BETWEEN COHORTS

	Change between cohorts	Changes by gender	Changes by social background
Family relationships			
Mother-child closeness	Increased	Higher for girls; no change over time	Lower for more disadvantaged groups; effect of financial strain reduces over time
Mother-child conflict	Increased	Lower for girls; no change over time	Higher for more disadvantaged groups; narrowing of gap by parental education and strain over time
Father-child closeness	Increased	Higher for girls than boys; no change in gender differences over time	Lower for more disadvantaged groups; less of an improvement over time for graduate and high-income groups
Father-child conflict	Apparent increase related to compositional change	Lower for girls; no change over time	Higher for more disadvantaged groups; effect of non-employment decreases over time
Child gets on very well with mother	Declined	More positive for girls; no change over time	More positive among lower-educated groups; negative effect of financial strain strengthens over time
Child gets on very well with father	Declined	More positive for girls; no change over time	More positive among lower-educated groups but parental education gap narrows over time; greater decline in non-employed and low-income families
Eat dinner together every day	Declined	Not significant at either time point	More frequent among working-class, lower educated and low-income groups; this gap widens over time
Peer relationships and activities			
Size of friendship group	Increased	Smaller among girls; no change over time	Larger among lower educated groups; difference widens over time
Frequency of seeing friends	Apparent decrease related to compositional change	Lower among girls; slight narrowing of gender gap over time	Higher among disadvantaged groups; no change over time
Frequency of engagement in sports	Declined	Lower among girls; no change over time	Increased differentiation by family background over time
Time spent on general play	No significant change	Higher for girls; some widening of gender gap over time	Higher among most and least advantaged groups; effect of strain reduces somewhat over time
Mobile phone ownership	Increased	Higher for girls; gender gap narrows over time	Higher for more disadvantaged groups; gap by social background reduces over time
Time spent watching TV	Declined	Not significant; no change over time	Little systematic variation but less of a reduction over time for more advantaged groups
Time spent using other devices	Increased	Lower for girls; no change over time	Lower in graduate families and higher for those in rented housing; less increase over time for more advantaged groups

TABLE 6.1 CONTD.

Formal and informal learning			
Attitudes to school	More positive	More positive for girls; no change over time	Initially more positive for disadvantaged groups; social differentiation reduces over time
Attitudes to reading	Apparent increase due to compositional changes	More positive for girls; no change over time	Little systematic variation; no change over time
Attitudes to Maths	No significant change overall	More positive for boys; gender gap widens over time	Little systematic variation initially; gap by parental education widens over time
Frequency of reading for fun	Lower than expected given increased educational profile	Higher for girls; narrowing of gender gap over time	Higher for more advantaged groups; gap widens over time
Cultural participation	Declined	Higher for girls; no change over time	Higher for more advantaged groups; some reduction in gap by parental education over time (though remains large)

The study has adopted a multidimensional approach to measuring the influence of family background factors, taking account of parental education, social class, income and financial strain, housing tenure, family structure and size as well as migrant status. Child experiences and outcomes are affected by different dimensions of family background but there is consistent evidence that activities such as sport, reading and cultural participation are strongly socially differentiated in ways that are likely to impinge on child outcomes. Housing tenure is not commonly examined in studies of children in Ireland (for a notable exception, see Laurence et al., forthcoming) but findings here highlight the link between living in rented accommodation (private or social) and lower engagement in play, sports and cultural activities and poorer-quality relations with parents. What is notable is that some differences by family background in children's lives actually widen over time. Sports participation becomes more socially structured over time as does the frequency of reading, with the gap between the most advantaged and least advantaged groups widening over the decade concerned. Children from more highly educated families increase their non-TV screentime less than other children and reduce their TV viewing somewhat less. The gap by parental education in attitudes to Maths also widens over time.

There are some domains where differences by family background reduce. Financial strain has less of an impact on mother-child closeness and conflict for Cohort '08. This should be interpreted with caution, however, as financial strain has a greater effect on mother-child relations from the child perspective among Cohort '08. There is some reduction in the gap in cultural participation by parental education,

though the difference in involvement between the most and least advantaged groups remains very large. After a slower engagement in mobile phone ownership among more advantaged families in Cohort '98, the social gradient in possession narrows over time.

In analysing changes in children's lives, there are some limitations to the study. The GUI instruments were designed to maximise cross-cohort comparison but inevitably some questions, particularly those on digital engagement, had to change over time to reflect broader social changes, making it challenging to compare like with like. Employing time-use data has helped to bridge this gap but 'light-touch' time-use diaries mean that we are unlikely to capture the full extent to which children engage in screentime as a secondary activity, for example. Further, the diaries do not record who the child was with when engaged in day-to-day activities so we are confined to a rough proxy (dining together) to capture parent-child time and cannot capture joint leisure pursuits. More fundamentally, the scale of changes in Irish society over the decade concerned mean that it is not possible to identify the main drivers of differences in children's lives. The analyses do point to trade-offs between screentime, reading and sports and cultural engagement but it is clear that between-cohort trends in sports and cultural participation are not accounted for merely by increased screentime.

6.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

The findings have significant implications for policy across a number of domains, including support for families, sports and leisure policy, and education policy.

Family support policies have moved towards a greater focus on early prevention (Tusla, 2013a; 2013b; DCEDIY, 2022), though challenges remain around levels of resourcing (McGregor and Devaney, 2020) and parental awareness of available supports (Rochford et al., 2014; Hickey and Leckey, 2021). The new national model of parenting support services envisages a continuum from universal services and information resources for all parents to services for parents in need of long-term intensive support (DCEDIY, 2022). The study findings highlight significantly lower levels of parent-child closeness and higher levels of conflict among families experiencing financial strain and living in rented accommodation. This pattern indicates the importance of locating family support policies within the context of broader anti-poverty policies. The child having a long-term illness or disability also emerges as a risk factor for poorer-quality relations, underlining the need for supports for these families. One dimension not often highlighted is the gendered nature of family relations: parents report closer and less conflictual relationships with their daughters than their sons; daughters, in turn, indicate feeling closer to their parents. These patterns suggest the need for family support policies to directly address potential gender stereotyping in interaction patterns.

Gender differences are starkly evident too in the day-to-day lives of 9-year-olds, with girls much less likely to be involved in sport and boys much less likely to engage in cultural pursuits. GUI data from both cohorts have consistently shown gender differences in engagement in physical exercise/sport (McNamara et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2009). Previous research indicates the importance of school in influencing access to sports and the immense potential of schools as an arena for promoting healthy behaviour (Nolan and Smyth, 2020). The Department of Education's Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport for Children and Young People Framework (DES, 2012) highlights the importance of the provision of sport as a co-curricular activity, as well as students choosing an active transport mode (such as walking or cycling) for everyday travel needs. Further research using GUI data could help identify the potential levers for encouraging girls into sport. GUI descriptive reports have also consistently highlighted differences by social background in the proportion of children reaching recommended physical activity levels as well as engagement in (largely paid-for) organised sports (McNamara et al., 2021). Of concern is the finding that sports participation has declined and become more socially differentiated over the decade between the two GUI cohorts. Schools can play an important role in encouraging physical exercise among children, but the findings also highlight the need for community-based facilities, given the constraints for small schools in provision of extracurricular sports (Nolan and Smyth, 2020).

Children from more advantaged families and girls are more likely to read often for pleasure and engage in structured cultural activities (such as music and drama clubs/lessons), all of which are positively related to their cognitive development (Smyth, 2016). It is of concern that there appears to be a widening in the gap by parental education in reading for pleasure over time. Previous research has shown that gender and social differences in cultural activities emerge early and are influential on patterns persisting into adolescence (Smyth, 2016). The current revision of the Aistear curriculum, as well as the two-year nature of subsidised early years provision, provide an opportunity to ensure an arts-rich experience for both boys and girls and for children from different socio-economic backgrounds. It is important that early years staff are provided with the appropriate professional development to support this domain of children's activities (see Arts Council, 2013).

The Department of Education's *Arts in Education Charter* (2013) commits to a promotion of arts-in-education on the part of schools and arts organisations. There are, however, challenges in smaller schools providing after-school cultural activities, highlighting the importance of linking school and community initiatives around the arts. In addition, boys' schools are less likely to provide after-school cultural activities (Smyth, 2016; 2020). The *Arts in Education Charter* recommends

the introduction of subsidies for more disadvantaged families to attend arts venues and performances. In a context where not all disadvantaged young people attend DEIS schools and not all cultural provision is provided through schools, this is a crucial avenue for ensuring more inclusive arts engagement.

Nine-year-olds are broadly positive about their school experiences but attitudes to reading and Maths are highly gendered. Indeed, there is evidence of a widening of the gender and social gap in attitudes to Maths, a pattern of concern given the role of early Maths experiences in later take-up of science subjects (Hannan and Smyth, 2021). At the time of writing, the revision of the primary curriculum, with a new Maths curriculum open for consultation in the first half of 2022, is ongoing. Curricular revision offers the opportunity to provide both boys and girls with a more engaging experience of school subjects, though continuous professional development is crucial in supporting any such changes.

Finally, it is worth noting that this report documents quite significant changes in the day-to-day lives of 9-year-olds in a period before the COVID-19 pandemic. In the midst of the pandemic, 12-year-olds from Cohort ’08 reported a decline in cultural participation and an increase in screentime with a significant proportion also curtailing their sports involvement (GUI Study Team, 2021). There is potential for this disruption to have long-lasting effects on the out-of-school lives of children and young people. Soon-to-be available data on Cohort ’08 at 13 years of age offer the potential to examine both the influence of broader social change and the experience of the pandemic on the lives of young people.

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