

CHILD
COHORT

JULY 2009



Growing Up
in Ireland

National Longitudinal
Study of Children

GROWING UP IN IRELAND

KEY FINDINGS: 9-YEAR-OLDS

NO. 2

THE FAMILIES OF 9-YEAR-OLDS

INTRODUCTION

This is the second in a series of *Key Findings* from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study. It summarises some of the facts about 9-year-olds and their families.

The family is one of the main influences on a child's development. The more supportive the family, the better the outcomes for the child are likely to be. 'The family' means more than just the size and composition of the household in which the child lives. It includes the complex inter-relationships between members of the household, such as those between the parent(s) and the child, and parenting practices and discipline within the family.

Four aspects of the families of 9-year-olds in Ireland are discussed: (i) the size and structure of families and their income levels; (ii) the impact of work on family life; (iii) parenting styles and (iv) discipline in the family.



Message from the Minister

I welcome the publication of the 'Families of 9-Year-Olds'. This is one of a series of *Key Findings* documents drawn from *Growing Up in Ireland - the National Longitudinal Study of Children*. These documents are designed to provide data and information on children in Ireland in an easily understood manner and should be useful to members of the public as well as policy makers.

The publication of this document would not be possible without the commitment and contribution from parents, teachers, principals and children themselves, all of whom have generously given their time to participate in *Growing Up in Ireland*. I would like to thank them all for their involvement in this very important study.



Barry Andrews TD
Minister for Children

FAMILY STRUCTURE

Differences in family structures can have a major impact on the level of financial, human and social resources and support that children receive in their early years.

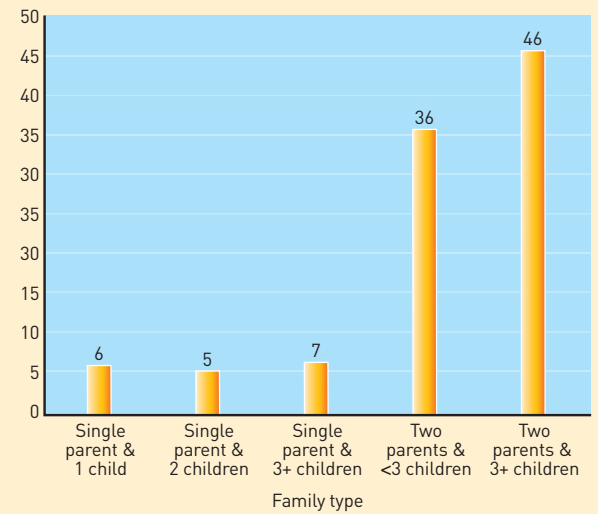
SIZE AND STRUCTURE OF THE FAMILIES OF 9-YEAR OLDS

- Just over 82% of 9-year-olds lived in two-parent households.
- The largest proportion of 9-year-olds lived in two-parent households where there were three or more resident children including themselves (46%).
- 18% of 9-year-olds lived in single-parent families. 11% lived in single-parent families containing either one or two children. The remainder (7%) lived in families with three or more children.

INCOME LEVELS

The income available to a family will clearly affect the circumstances and outcomes of the child. **Figure 2** indicates how family types are distributed in terms of income levels.¹ In **Figure 2**, the top 20% of households in terms of their income are compared to those in the bottom 20%.

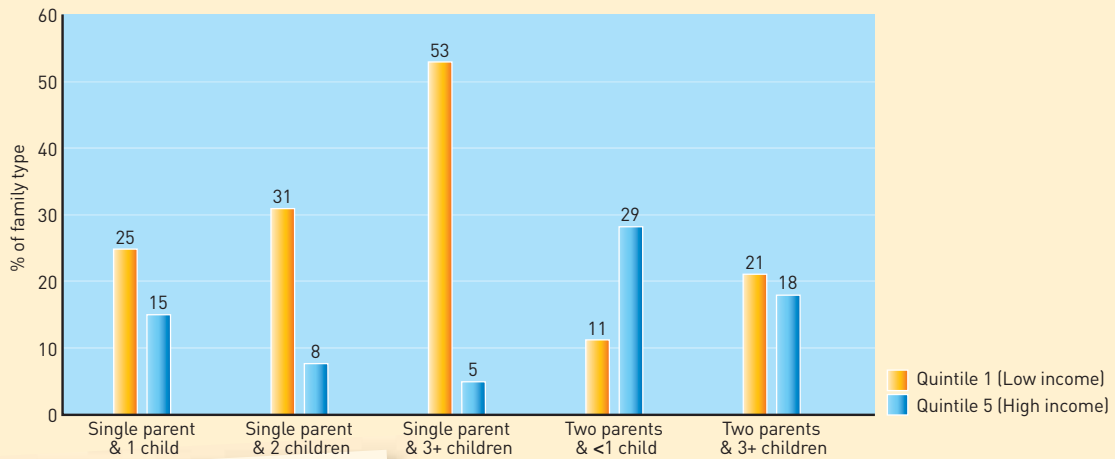
Figure 1: Types of family in which 9-year-olds live



- 29% of smaller two-parent families were in the top income group. In contrast, only 5% of the largest single-parent families were in the top income category.
- Lone-parent families were predominantly in the lowest income group. This was especially so for the largest single-parent families (with three or more children), 53% of whom were in the lowest income group.

¹ Incomes have been adjusted to account for differences in family size and composition.

Figure 2: Relationship between family type and level of household income.



WORK AND FAMILY

WORK STATUS AND WORK LIFE BALANCE

Work commitments outside the home may reduce the amount and quality of time available for family activities, resulting in family time being less enjoyable and more pressured than would otherwise be the case. Issues of work-life balance affect the functioning of the family and, in particular, the amount and quality of time spent with children.

PARENT(S) OF OVER HALF OF CHILDREN WORKED OUTSIDE THE HOME

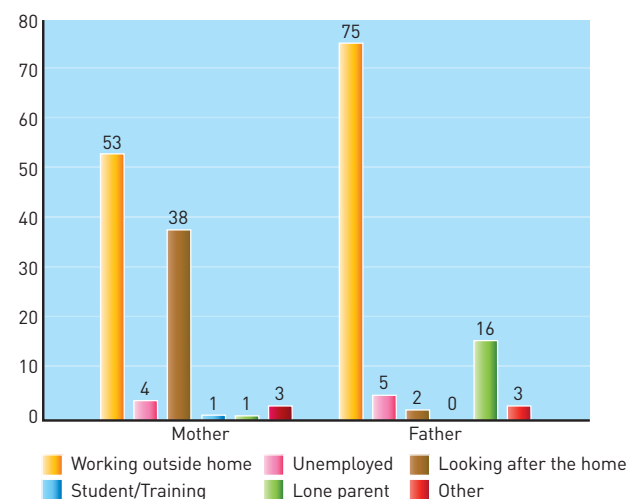
Mothers and fathers were asked to select from a list of 10 options that best described their situation with regard to work. **Figure 3** summarises the results.

- Just over half (53%) of all mothers of 9-year-olds classified themselves as principally working outside the household; a further 38% recorded that they mainly looked after the home.
- Much smaller proportions said they were unemployed (4%), a student/in training (1%) or 'other'² (3%). The remaining 1% of 9-year-olds were in families where the mother was not resident – that is, lone-father households.³



- 75% of 9-year-olds were in families in which the father was working outside the home, 5% where he was unemployed, 2% where he was looking after the home and 3% where he was in the 'other' status category.²
- The remaining 16% of 9-year-olds were in families in which the father was not resident – that is, lone-mother households.³

Figure 3: Main work status of mother and father



- For 41% of 9-year-olds, the mother and father³ were both resident and also working outside the home. A further 11% lived in lone-parent households where the parent worked outside the home. This means that just under half (48%) of all 9-year-olds had a resident parent who was not working outside the home.
- On average, mothers who worked outside the home did so for 27 hours per week. The average number of hours worked by fathers was 47 hours per week.

² Ill, disabled, unable to work.

³ As defined here, usually though not necessarily, the biological parent(s).



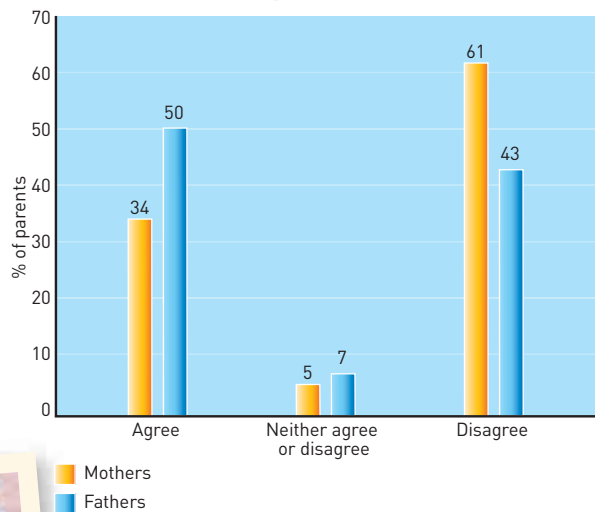
IMPACT OF WORK ON FAMILY ACTIVITIES VARIED BETWEEN MOTHERS AND FATHERS

Parents were asked about the impact that work responsibilities had on family life and activities.

- Just under two-thirds (61%) of mothers and 43% of fathers felt they had not missed out on home or family activities (that they would otherwise have liked to take part in) because of their work commitments (Figure 4).

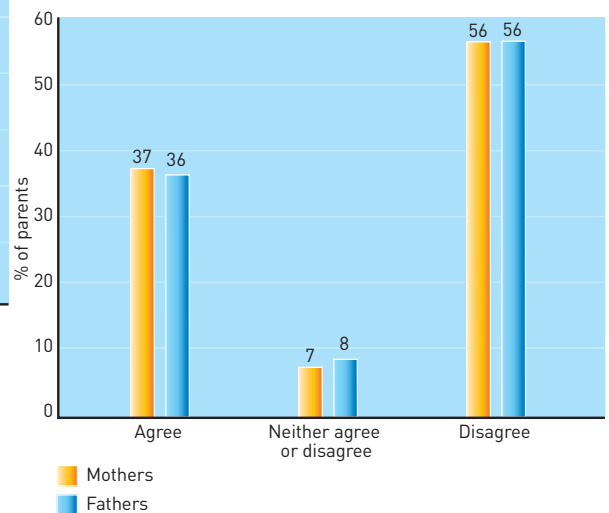
This means that one-third of mothers (34%) and half of fathers (50%) felt that the amount of time they were able to spend with their family was being adversely affected by their work commitments.

Figure 4: Level of agreement with statement that parent had missed out on home or family activities as a result of work responsibilities



- The *quality* of family time was also being negatively affected by work commitments for sizeable proportions of children and their parents – 37% of mothers and 36% of fathers agreed with the statement ‘*Because of your work responsibilities your family time is less enjoyable and more pressured*’. However, the majority (56%) of both mothers and fathers disagreed with this statement (Figure 5).
- The impact of work outside the home on family life did not vary substantially with characteristics such as family type, educational attainment or social class. The main factor associated with a sense of missing out on family life as a result of work was, not unexpectedly, the number of hours worked. For both mothers and fathers there was a very clear and strong relationship between the number of hours worked outside the home and its perceived impact on both the extent and quality of family time and activities.

Figure 5: Level of agreement with statement that family time was less enjoyable and more pressured because of work responsibilities



PARENTING STYLE

Children were asked to answer a series of confidential questions on their relationship with their mother and father (as relevant). As with all the questions in the children's questionnaires, they were simple and used child-friendly language and concepts. Using this information, families were subsequently classified into four types of parenting style, as follows:

- Authoritative** – a high level of control combined with a high level of support for the child
- Authoritarian** – a high level of control combined with a low level of support for the child
- Permissive** – a low level of control combined with a high level of acceptance of the child's behaviour
- Neglectful** – a low level of control combined with a low level of acceptance of the child's behaviour

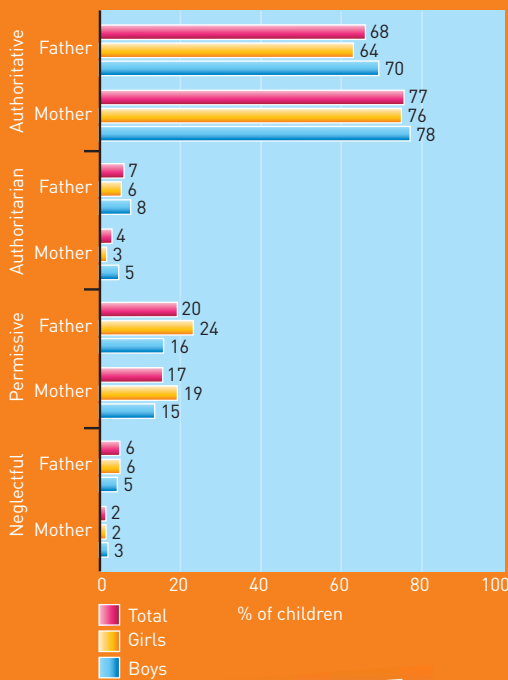
In previous research, an authoritative parenting style has usually been associated with the best child outcomes.

OVER TWO-THIRDS OF CHILDREN FELT THEIR PARENTS HAD AN AUTHORITATIVE STYLE

Figure 6 shows that:

- 77% of 9-year-olds reported having authoritative mothers, with little differentiation between boys and girls.
- Boys were more likely to report having authoritative fathers (70%) than girls (64%).
- There was a higher incidence of authoritarian parenting among fathers (7%) than among mothers (4%).
- 17% of 9-year-olds had mothers whose parenting style would be described as permissive. The comparable figure for fathers was 20%.
- 2% of mothers and 6% of fathers had a parenting style that was classified as neglectful.

Figure 6: Parenting style of mothers and fathers, by child's gender



MOST MOTHERS DISCIPLINED THEIR CHILDREN BY DISCUSSING WHY THEIR BEHAVIOUR WAS WRONG

Mothers were asked to indicate how frequently they used each of nine types of discipline strategies.

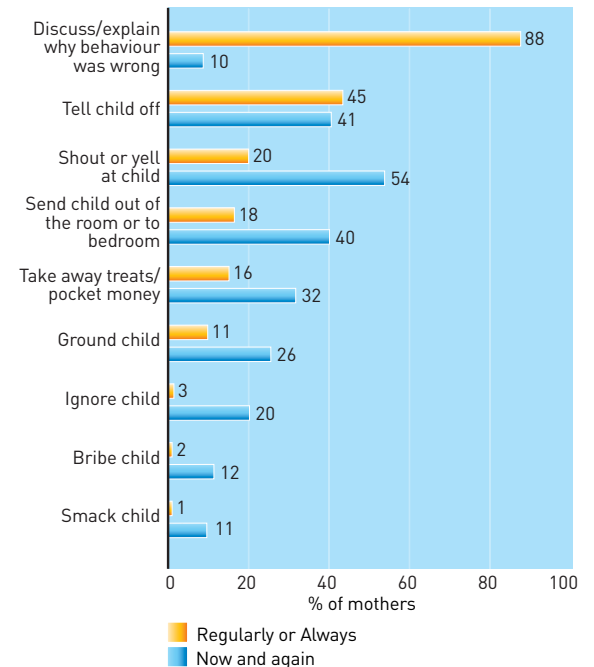
Figure 7 shows that:

- The most frequently used method of discipline was 'discussing/explaining why the behaviour is wrong' – adopted 'regularly' or 'always' by 88% of mothers.
- 'Telling the child off' was used 'regularly' or 'always' by 45% of mothers.

At the other end of the scale in terms of frequency of use:

- Less than 1% (0.5%) recorded smacking their 9-year-old child 'regularly or always'. 11% of mothers said they smacked their child 'now and again'. The remaining 88% 'never or rarely' smacked their child.
- 2% said they would 'bribe' and 3% said they would 'ignore' their child 'regularly or always'.

Figure 7: Mother's self-reported use of discipline strategies





Growing Up in Ireland is the National Longitudinal Study of Children. This Study aims to track, from infancy through to adolescence, the lives of two representative cohorts of children in Ireland – an infant cohort (recruited at 9 months of age) and a child cohort (recruited when they were 9 years old).

The Study is funded by the Department of Health and Children through the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, in association with the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Central Statistics Office. It is being carried out by a consortium of researchers led by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD).

Focusing initially on the child cohort, the first wave of fieldwork, which included approximately 8,500 nine-year-old children, their parents and their teachers, began in September 2007 and was completed in May 2008. This document is one of a series that summarises key findings from that wave of fieldwork.

The success of ***Growing Up in Ireland*** is the result of contributions from many individuals, organisations and groups, including principals, teachers and other staff in over 1,000 National Schools who helped with recruitment and data collection. We are particularly grateful to the 8,500 9-year-olds and their families, each of whom gave so generously of their time to make this Study possible.



If you would like further information about ***Growing Up in Ireland***, please visit

www.growingup.ie

e-mail growingup@esri.ie

or freephone 1800 200 434

The figures reported above are preliminary and may be subject to change.

