Growing Up in Scotland – 2009 – Topic Research Findings

Growing Up in Scotland (GUS):
Parenting and the Neighbourhood Context
Summary Report

The Growing Up in Scotland Study

The Growing Up in Scotland Study (GUS) is an important longitudinal research project aimed at tracking the lives of a cohort of Scottish children from the early years, through childhood and beyond. The study is funded by the Scottish Government and carried out by the Scottish Centre for Social Research (ScotCen). Its principal aim is to provide information to support policy-making, but it is also intended to be a broader resource that can be drawn on by academics, voluntary sector organisations and other interested parties. Focusing initially on a cohort of 5,217 children aged 0-1 years old (birth cohort) and a cohort of 2,859 children aged 2-3 years old (child cohort), the first wave of fieldwork began in April 2005.

Background to Report

This document is one of a series that summarises key findings from the third sweep of the survey which was launched in April 2007.

It presents key findings from the Growing Up in Scotland study (GUS) report *Parenting and the neighbourhood context.* The report uses data from GUS to explore families' experiences of living in Scotland's neighbourhoods, to examine parents' views on different aspects of their local area and to consider the relationship between area characteristics and parenting behaviours.

The findings in the report are drawn mainly from data collected in the neighbourhood module which was run in the third wave of fieldwork (undertaken between April 2007 and May 2008) - when children in the birth cohort were aged just

under 3 years old and those in the child cohort were just under 5 years old. However, information from the first two waves of GUS is also used.

This report discusses the availability and use of local facilities amongst parents in the study and their perceptions of the quality of these services. It goes on to explore respondent's general perceptions of the area where they live, in order to gauge how satisfied they are with their area. Perceptions of safety are also discussed. The availability of informal social networks and social support is explored, as are parental perceptions of how 'child-friendly' their local area is. Analysis was also undertaken to explore the association between area characteristics and a number of parenting behaviours.

Introduction

Creating communities that provide a supportive environment for children and families is a key aim of the Scottish Government Early Years Framework. In order to build stronger communities through improving the physical and social environment in which children and families live, it is essential to understand how different groups of people in Scotland feel about the area they live in, and how they perceive and make use of the facilities and resources in their local area. Furthermore, in the context of the Early Years Framework, it is important to explore and understand the possible positive or negative impacts that living in communities with particular characteristics may have on children as they grow up.

Satisfaction with local area and facilities

Parents were asked a series of questions to gauge their general satisfaction with their local area and their use and appraisal of various local facilities and services.

- Eighty-one percent of parents are very or fairly satisfied with the area where they live.

- Satisfaction levels varied according to area characteristics being higher amongst those parents living in areas of lower deprivation and those in rural areas, and lower amongst those living in areas of high deprivation and in urban locales.

- The facilities used most often by parents were GPs, community health services and playgrounds and parks.

- A majority (88%) of parents in both cohorts reported having a public park or playground within 10 minutes walk of their home. This varied significantly by area urban-rural characteristics from 95% in small accessible towns to only 57% in remote rural areas.

- People living in rural areas were also less likely to have access to other services including childcare, health and leisure facilities than were those in urban areas.

- Areas of higher deprivation also suffered from a lack of childcare, health and leisure facilities. This was most striking in relation to childcare services. However, these areas were more likely to benefit from other services such as Credit Unions and advice centres

- Satisfaction with local facilities was generally high. Overall, 31% of respondents were highly satisfied, 26% reported medium satisfaction and 44% of respondents had low satisfaction. Parents living in deprived areas, and those in social housing were most likely to report low area satisfaction.

- Local health and education services were rated highest by parents, whereas facilities for children and young people were rated lowest.

- Accordingly, facilities for young children were those seen as being most in need of improvement - selected by one fifth of respondents. Housing and levels of crime were also identified as key local issues which required attention.

Social networks

Social networks are defined as the personal relationships which are accumulated when people interact with each other in families, neighbourhoods and elsewhere. The existence and strength of such networks can impact on different areas of the lives of parents and children. Two indices were constructed to measure the extent to which parents had a satisfactory friendship network and a satisfactory family network. Variations in the existence of networks were explored according to individual and neighbourhood characteristics.

- Three-quarters of parents in both cohorts had a satisfactory friendship network with a similar proportion having a satisfactory family network. A little over half (57%) had both satisfactory networks and only 10% in the birth cohort and 8% in the child cohort had neither.

- Older mothers were less likely to have satisfactory family networks than were younger mothers. Some of this difference may be accounted for by differences in the number of, and frequency of contact with, the child's grandparents amongst the older group.

- Generally speaking, more disadvantaged circumstances were associated with less satisfactory networks. Parents in lower-income households, those in socially-rented accommodation, and those living in area of high deprivation were less likely to have satisfactory networks than were parents in higher income households, owner-occupied accommodation or living in less deprived areas.

- Individual rather than area characteristics appeared to be more important. Maternal age, household income, and tenure were all significantly and independently associated with having a satisfactory friendship network.

- Maternal age was also significantly associated with having a satisfactory family network, as was tenure.

Area child-friendliness

To measure, in combination, parents' perceptions of their local area along with their views on broader aspects of social parenting, respondents were asked a series of attitudinal questions which explored their perceptions of the extent to which supporting parents was a local priority or, in other words, how 'child-friendly' they believed their local area to be.

- Overall, most parents said their local area was moderately or very child-friendly. Only 20% of parents in the birth cohort perceived their neighbourhood to have low child-friendliness

- More deprived areas were generally perceived by parents to be less child-friendly; 43% of parents living in the most deprived areas said their area had low child-friendliness compared with 5% in the least deprived areas.

- Parents in rural areas rated their neighbourhoods more highly in terms of child-friendliness than did parents in urban areas; 38% of parents in remote rural areas said their area had high child-friendliness compared with 14% in large urban areas.

- Ratings of neighbourhood satisfaction and of local facilities matched those of child-friendliness. Thus parents who were dissatisfied with their neighbourhood and who gave local facilities a poor rating were also negative about the area's child-friendliness.

- The multivariate analysis revealed that living in a rural area, higher levels of neighbourhood satisfaction, a positive rating of local facilities, having a satisfactory friendship network, and residing longer at the current address were all significantly and independently related to a higher perceived notion of area child-friendliness.

Area characteristics and parenting behaviours

Analysis was undertaken to determine the independent association between key objective and subjective area characteristics and a number of parenting behaviours – variety of parent-child activities, attendance at a parent and child group, number of sources used for advice on child health, and attitude toward seeking help and support – whilst controlling for individual and household-level measures.

- Area urban-rural characteristics were significantly associated with differences in parents' engagement in most of these behaviours. Rurality or remoteness was positively associated with a greater variety of parent-child activities, attendance at a parent-child group and willingness to seek help and support.

- The existence or not, of social networks is also key. Parents who reported more satisfactory networks engaged in more activities with their child, and were more open to seeking help and support as well as being more likely to do so than were parents with fewer satisfactory networks.

- Parents' perceptions of their local area in terms of neighbourhood satisfaction, ratings of local facilities and child-friendliness were generally not associated with variations in parenting behaviour. However, higher perceptions of the quality of local facilities were weakly related to a greater participation in parent-child activities and a willingness to seek parenting advice and support.

Conclusion

There is clear evidence that the differences and similarities between services in different types of neighbourhoods matter to parents. Parents in different neighbourhoods have very different objective conditions which impact on how they see their area. This is reflected in overall satisfaction with the area, and, in urban areas, parents' perceptions and use of services as well as their sense of its child-friendliness.

The findings here suggest that improvements to facilities for children and young people, particularly in more deprived areas, would seem to not only have benefits for child health through increased opportunity for outdoor play, but also for parents' satisfaction with their local area and it's child-friendliness. Furthermore, the consistently significant, and generally positive, impact of having satisfactory networks on parenting behaviours and perceptions of the local community would suggest that measures which seek to improve parents' informal networks through area-based programmes or interventions would have wider benefits on child outcomes.

Further information on the Growing Up in Scotland study can also be found at: www.growingupinscotland.org.uk

If you wish further copies of this Research Findings or have any enquiries about the GUS project, please contact:

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Or visit our Website: www.scotland.gov.uk/insight

The research findings and the main report can be viewed on the Internet at:
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Research/by-topic/children-and-young-people/publications

The site carries up-to-date information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government. Subjects covered include transport, housing, social inclusion, rural affairs, children and young people, education, social work, community care, local government, civil justice, crime and criminal justice, regeneration, planning and women's issues. The site also allows access to information about the Scottish Household Survey.