

**Growing Up in Scotland Year 3 Results  
Conference 18<sup>th</sup> March 2009, Glasgow Royal Concert Hall  
Notes from afternoon workshop sessions**

(Please note that the views expressed in this document are those of the workshop participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Scottish Government.)

**Workshop 1 – Non-resident parents**

Professor Fran Wasoff from the University of Edinburgh presented the concluding findings from the Non-resident Parents report. She noted that it will be interesting to look at how contact arrangements evolve as the children in GUS get older, as parents re-partner and as the children themselves develop their own friendship networks, participate in more activities and begin to express their own preferences. She ended with some key questions for policy and practice:

- What to do about no contact, where it is desired by the child or mother?
- What to do about contact when it is not desired by the child or mother?
- How best to support the great majority of parents who live apart who do not use the courts/justice system to achieve positive parenting relationships?
- How to minimise any conflict over contact?

Sue Robertson, Director of One Parent Families Scotland provided a response to the findings. She noted that the research raises many further questions. For example, why is there less contact in re-partnered situations – is this because of the quality of the parenting relationship after re-partnering or because there is (usually) a new ‘father figure’ in the household?

Sue noted some gaps – issues that GUS doesn’t provide information on:

- The views and experiences of non-resident fathers
- Housing circumstances of non-resident fathers – are they suitable for having a child or children to stay overnight?
- What are the attitudes of other family members e.g. grandparents?

In terms of surprises, Sue noted with interest the number of fathers joining households as well as leaving them.

Points raised during the discussion:

- Should service providers be doing more to engage with non-resident parents and fathers in particular? For example, where parents are separated, do schools communicate with the non-resident parent as well as the resident one?
- Perhaps we have been missing the bigger picture that many contact arrangements are good, stable and unproblematic for parents and children.
- There is a need for more qualitative research on this issue, particularly *with* non-resident parents themselves.
- Research needed on the use of supervised contact/ contact centres.

- In terms of dissemination we should ensure that the findings are disseminated to Local Authorities, to those working directly with children and their families. Practitioners talked about how difficult it can be to use research findings to influence practice. There is a fear of 'preaching' or being over-prescriptive. Inter-agency 'practice forums' should be set up, for practitioners to discuss research like GUS, to help practitioners to challenge policy-makers.

## **Workshop 2 – Food and Activity**

- a. Louise Marryat from the Scottish Centre for Social Research went into some greater depth regarding the findings on food and activity
- b. Fiona Macleod from the Food Standards Agency Scotland provided a response

### **Feedback from the attendees**

1. One delegate asked whether GUS looked at whether Healthy Start vouchers were used to buy fruit and vegetables.
2. Regarding the fact that breastfeeding only predicted a small proportion of change in BMI, someone familiar with the field suggested that children's BMI measurements can be unstable on very young children due to rapid changes in height. It would perhaps be more useful only to look at weight.
3. There was also a question regarding whether the mother's weight was measured in the survey, as this is known to be highly correlated with children's BMI.
4. There were a range of questions regarding the breastfeeding findings. One concerned whether GUS enquired about exclusive breastfeeding. In response, it was stated that exclusive breastfeeding was not part of the Scottish policy target at the time of survey design, and that the MCS sample for Scotland had collected such data. This may be considered for future cohorts.
5. There were some further questions regarding how fruit consumption was measured and how the results can be related to the 5-a-day target. In response, it was clarified that the 5-a-day target is not appropriate to children at the time, and during the design of the food module, the advice from the FSA was to measure variety of fruits and vegetables as opposed to quantity.
6. There was some discussion regarding the reliability of measurements based on portions and the difficulty for parents in reporting food consumption in terms of 'portions'.
7. Given the results from the childcare report, there was a concern regarding the reliability and usefulness of assessing children's nutrition without actually being able to account for what children eat when they are away from home and not with the mother.
8. The facilitator, Katherine Backett-Milburn from the University of Edinburgh encouraged some discussion on the activity findings. It was stressed how difficult it is for children to play outside and how much 'safety' has become a great concern, meaning parents are more appeased to have children play indoors.

9. There was unanimous agreement that more child-friendly spaces were needed, particularly in more urban areas, where children could play freely. A reference was made to a scheme in Holland where home-zones have been created in residential areas. These zones include trees and other features making it difficult for cars to drive through at speed and thus creating safe spaces for child-play.
10. A further suggestion to increase children's unstructured play was to make better use of spaces already available. Reference was made to how in many other European countries, school gates remain open (or gates do not exist), thus making it possible for children to use the school yard and play facilities (e.g. often a basketball court) even during after school hours.
11. It was noted that an issue to be considered when discussing children's outdoor play is the territorialism which exists between different groups and ages of children, meaning some areas may be theoretically suitable for all children, but in practice only used by some (e.g. the older children).

### **Workshop 3:**

#### **Use of multiple childcare provision and its effect on child outcomes**

The workshop began with Paul Bradshaw of the Scottish Centre for Social Research providing more detail about the use of multiple of childcare provision and its effect on child outcomes in the Growing up in Scotland data. Some of the key findings presented were as follows:

- Use of any childcare seems to peak around the period when the child is aged 3-4 with 99% of families using some form of care outside of that provided by the respondent and their partner. This coincides with statutory pre-school attendance.
- 31% of families used more than one provider when the child was aged 0-1 with this figure increasing to 59% when the child was 3-4 years old. The use of multiple childcare providers seemed to peak at ages 3 – 4.
- 82% of families using one provider at sweep 3 were also using one provider at sweep 1. However the picture was a little more varied for those using three providers at sweep 1. Of these families, 31% used one provider at sweep 3, 49% used two providers at sweep 3 and 20% used three providers at sweep 3.
- Fragmentation of care was very apparent. In some cases one family may use one provider for 30 hours per week whereas another family may use four providers for a total of 14 hours per week.
- However, this fragmentation of care at age 10 months was not itself related to cognitive development. Nor was childcare at age 34 months associated with social/emotional/behavioural development at 58 months.
- Grandparents have a huge role in Childcare. Of those families using two or more providers, 84% in the birth cohort and 71% in the child cohort involved the grandparents.

Margaret Brunton of the Scottish Pre-school Play Association then responded with the following remarks:

- The research is valuable but a lot of what was reported was no great surprise to those working in the childcare environment, particularly with respect to aspects such as the complexity of childcare arrangements, its cost and the role of informal providers.
- The general trend of increased maternal employment has not been matched by flexible childcare. The fragmented childcare patterns highlighted within the Growing up in Scotland study most likely reflect the problem that in many cases working mothers simply cannot find a provider that meets their requirements for a working day. In many cases, this shortfall is met by the grandparents.
- This fragmentation may also reflect differences in cost and the fact that childcare is generally a very costly activity.
- Two key challenges we face in relation to childcare provision:
  - (i) We need to develop models of childcare provision that are flexible enough to absorb the changes in family employment structures, in particular the increase in maternal employment. This will lead to reduced levels of fragmentation.
  - (ii) More needs to be done with regard to the use of informal networks in childcare within the community. The role of Grandparents is key and more needs to be made of their contribution.

The workshop was then opened to the floor for a general discussion about the childcare findings in GUS.

It was noted that there is no provision within GUS for the level of childcare fragmentation within a single day. Although weekly data were available it might be useful to see how fragmentation occurs in a single day for those children who use more than one provider daily. It was also noted that although childcare arrangements can be a source of stress for the parents in terms of fitting it around working lives, in some cases this stress can be equally strong for the Grandparents who may have responsibility for picking up and dropping off the Grandchildren at nursery etc. This is often overlooked.

There was a lot of interest within the workshop in the analysis of different groups within the data, in particular groups such as ethnic minorities and children with poor health or physical disability. This was suggested as a good avenue for future work, although in some cases the size of the GUS sample prevents robust analysis of groups such as ethnic minorities due to small numbers.

With regard to the role of informal care in early life and later cognitive outcomes it was suggested that the education of the Grandparents may be an important factor, given what we know about the role of parental education. Paul suggested that it may be beyond the scope of the study given the time constraints that are in place when administering the questionnaire itself. He also suggested that we can never expect to account for all of the variation within children's development outcomes no matter the number of variables that are inputted into a model.

The longer term ambitions of GUS were also discussed, in particular the anticipated duration of follow-up. Paul stated that in terms of the over-arching aims of the study and its ambitions with regard to providing evidence for future policy, it is hoped to continue following the children in the birth cohort into adulthood. However, this is by no means set in stone.

A representative from the Scottish Government emphasised the importance of the Early Years Framework (EYF) and the challenges that lie in its implementation. In particular, it was noted that this needed to be achieved with co-ordination from all sectors including national and local government as well as the voluntary and private sectors. This process holds the key to successful implementation of the EYF.

#### **Workshop 4 – Parenting and the neighbourhood context**

##### *Presentation*

Professor Lynn Jamieson from the University of Edinburgh provided a brief overview and handout of the GUS findings in relation to the Scottish Government's *National Performance Framework*.

Lynn highlighted the difference in the results between those parents from the *most* deprived areas and those from the *least* deprived areas, particularly in relation to (a) sustainable places and access to amenities; (b) community spirit and support networks; and (iii) the quality of facilities and services in their area.

##### *Response*

Amanda Godsell from Play Scotland (AG) responded to the following questions:

*Do the findings concur with what you already know? Are there any surprises?*

AG was not surprised by any of the findings. However, she was particularly interested in the findings which related to outdoor play and the notion of 'child friendly' areas.

*What do the results mean for your organisation and other people in the sector/people working with young children and their families? Will the findings influence what you do?*

AG noted that one of the biggest challenges with the National Framework was making the link between national policy objectives and practice at a local authority level. AG also commented that, for example, child play services are not measured in community planning partnerships 'outcomes', which poses particular problems for her organisation. This prompted AG to question how central 'child friendly practices' are in current community planning policy.

AG also noted that *Play Scotland's* own research had identified community safety as a key issue in whether parents allow children to play in public spaces.

#### **Discussion**

Several key themes and issues emerged from the group discussion which followed.

##### *Investment and maintenance of public services*

The issue of why people from deprived areas are less likely to use public or open spaces in their neighbourhood was raised. The group identified two key issues – the poor 'quality' of many of these spaces and concerns around safety – which were

thought to be key factors in why many individuals chose not to use public/open spaces in these areas.

One of the key points raised around the issue of 'quality' was the need for significant and continuous investment by local authorities to ensure these public open spaces are well maintained and continue to meet the needs of the community. Some members of the group thought this could be addressed through the theme of 'sustainable places' embedded within the national framework. It was also recognised that although the Scottish Government/local authorities have a key role to play in providing the necessary resources, communities also need to be actively involved in the process if these spaces are to remain relevant to the community.

#### *Participation agenda at the community level*

The previous point raised the issue of *involving* communities in neighbourhood regeneration and planning. Although the concept of 'participation' is at the heart of much current policy, practitioners agreed that involving the community in such matters can often be difficult to achieve in practice. Several reasons for this were noted by the group, including: the need to educate individuals and communities in the potential (and limitations) of the democratic process; the different levels of participation and their relationship to the decision-making process; individual barriers to participation, such as low self-confidence, fear of public speaking etc and general apathy/disillusionment in the 'consultation' process among many people in more deprived areas.

It was also noted that participation often requires significant resources, commitment, time etc. which can be difficult to achieve when current practice is often measured in terms of 'outputs'.

#### *Provision for all ages, groups, members etc. within the neighbourhood*

Several members of the group noted that as services are usually aimed at particular groups within the community, some groups are often overlooked. For example, one practitioner highlighted the fact that in her area there is a range of services for children aged 5 and under, but very little aimed specifically at 6-12 year olds.

#### *Community resources*

Another issue discussed by the group was the quality and accessibility of community centres. It was noted by some that many are poorly maintained and generally of poor quality, which limits their potential as a valuable community resource. It was suggested by one practitioner that other local agencies and services (e.g. libraries) could play a more active role in providing a wide range of services to parents and children beyond their more traditional core duties.

#### *Value in providing formal and informal services*

Many practitioners highlighted the importance of providing informal services (e.g. social events for parents of teenagers) as well as more formal ones (e.g. parenting classes), as these are often the only way of engaging with some members of the community. However, it was thought by some practitioners that although many informal services may be developed into more formal services, it was not thought to be necessary, or even desirable in some cases, for this to be the overall aim of such provision. The group also recognised that informal services have significant resource implications and cannot be thought of as a 'cheap' alternative to more formal services by policy-makers.

### *The issue of universal/targeted provision*

The final issue raised during the discussion was the need to find the right balance between universal and targeted services in ways that ensures no vulnerable parents and/or children fall between the 'gaps'. It was recognised that a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of 'vulnerability' needs to be recognised at both a practice and policy level.

## **Workshop 5 – Early activities and cognitive development**

### Summary of discussion

- “Activities” covers a similar range of ideas to the “home learning environment” in the EPPE study in England. This suggested that children living in disadvantaged areas but having a fully stimulating home environment reach the same level of cognitive ability by age 11 as children from more advantaged backgrounds.
- In answer to the question “who is responsible for a child’s cognitive development?” - health visitors, policy makers and decision makers in health boards all play a role.
- It would be useful if others who have not been involved in the writing of the report could take on the task of drawing out the main lessons. Sometimes it is harder for those too close to its production to see the most important points.
- A single page summary of the report tailored for GPs (or other professionals) could be usefully provided to GPs, although it would need input from relevant professionals.
- The report does not deal with 3 confounders, which have been shown to be of importance to cognitive development: parental IQ, parental sensitivity and parental mental state. Parental IQ could be measured relatively easily, to get a handle on genetic differences. However, this is not a major focus of GUS. The 1970 birth cohort study, looking at children of the original sample, could provide useful information about this. It was recommended that parental sensitivity was examined in the new birth cohort. Information about parental mental health is already recorded, and should be considered in future analysis.
- The importance of health visitors in early identification of problems was stressed.
- Post-natal depression is routinely screened for, and has been shown to be associated with poor cognitive outcomes. However, the mechanism is via parental sensitivity towards the child. The right interventions are not regularly being offered in such cases.

- Isolation is a major feature of referrals to integrated services. It is vital that parents have someone to lead them through the services available, and to encourage engagement. It is also important that parents have someone to show them how to play and interact successfully with their children.
- The importance of health visitors was again stressed, but only as part of a fit-for-purpose service.
- Early intervention goes as far as identifying pregnant women who are vulnerable, and in areas where this is done, there have been positive results.
- There is a huge demand on services, and there is a danger that moving towards universal provision will dilute the intensity of the services for those who need them most. There is evidence to suggest that services targeted at the most vulnerable families work.
- The voluntary sector plays a major part in engaging with families.
- It can be difficult for some families to offer a high quality home learning environment because of mothers' poor mental health.
- There is a danger that focus on early years dilutes the focus on school education.
- There is a need for wrap-around support to help families interact with children, and it is wrong to leave this until the child reaches school age. Children who are identified as being slow in their language development must be supported as soon as the late development is identified.
- There is a need to prove that it is cheaper to intervene early. It is likely that less public money will be available in the future, so we should not use it when we see the lights flashing (due to violence, poor attainment at school, drug abuse, etc.), but we should prevent the lights flashing. Early years support should be focused on prevention of problems.
- Data does show a quick payback on early years' spending. See, for example, work by David Old, which suggests a return by the age of 4, and a massive saving by the age of 15.
- Much of the discussion has so far focused on the most at risk children. However, the report shows there are potential problems for around 20% of children who are of poorer cognitive development.
- It would be useful to capture the expectations of parents in the new birth cohort.

- It was suggested that the impact of older siblings was of interest, but this has so far not been analysed.
- GUS provides a useful sampling frame for future qualitative studies.
- The GUS team welcomes suggestions for future questionnaire content and analysis.
- A question was asked about the impact of more than 40 hours non-parental care on cognitive development, as this had been shown to be a risk factor for poor social and behavioural development.
- While discussion has been more about the role of government than the role of parents, there is obviously a very important role for parents. The role of government is to provide the right support for the right people at the right time.