

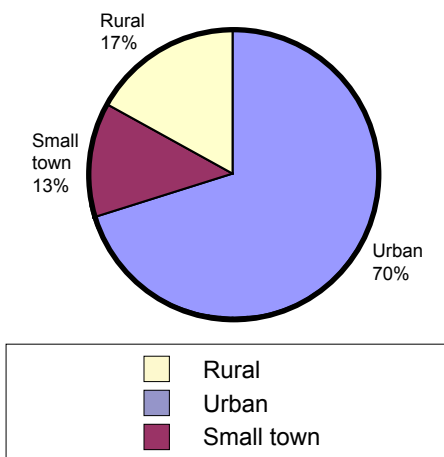
Growing up in rural Scotland



Introduction

The majority of children in Scotland live in cities and towns. However, a substantial minority of our children are growing up in rural areas. Policy makers are interested in comparing the experiences of children and families in rural, remote and small town Scotland with those who live in urban areas. This briefing presents some key findings from the GUS study about family circumstances, child health and well being, parental support and service use.

Chart 1 - Location of GUS children at Sweep 1



Categories based on the Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification

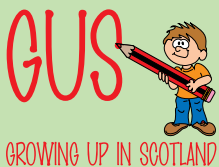
Key findings

- Children in rural Scotland are slightly more likely than those in urban areas to be born into relatively more advantaged situations.
- There are some positive factors relating to the health and well-being of children in rural Scotland – breastfeeding rates are higher in rural areas and mothers are less likely to smoke.
- Children in rural areas are more likely to have 'child-rich' social lives.
- Families with very young children make less use of formal childcare in rural areas.

Family circumstances

GUS shows us that although children live in a great variety of circumstances in both rural and urban areas, children in rural Scotland are slightly more likely than those in urban areas to be born into relatively more advantaged situations. In rural areas:

- Mothers tend to be older
- Children are less likely to be living in lone parent households (7% of babies compared to 23% in large urban areas)
- Mothers are more likely to have degree level qualifications



Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) is a major longitudinal research study following the lives of 8,000 children from infancy through to adolescence. Launched in 2005, the study provides a wealth of information to support policy making and planning of services

for young children and their families. Families taking part in the study are being interviewed annually until their child is 5 to capture crucial data about the early experiences and circumstances of children in Scotland today. For more information about GUS please visit the study website:

www.growingupinScotland.org.uk

The main findings from the first year of interviews (Sweep 1) were published in January 2007. Three further reports were produced to examine in detail

some areas of particular interest to policy makers, practitioners and others. This Briefing provides a summary of the Report 'Growing Up in Rural Scotland'.

GUS is being carried out by the Scottish Centre for Social Research (ScotGen) in collaboration with the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) at the University of Edinburgh. The study is funded by The Scottish Government.

- Children are more likely to be living in working households and consequently less likely to be living in low income households
- Children are more likely to live in households with access to a car, home internet and a garden
- Children are less likely to have been born as a result of an unplanned pregnancy

Health and wellbeing

There are few significant differences in child and health well-being across rural and urban areas. However, there are some positive factors relating to the health and well being of children in rural Scotland. Parental concerns about toddlers' development were lower in rural areas. Breastfeeding was higher in rural areas (75% of mothers in remote rural areas breastfed their child compared to 60% in large urban areas) while mothers in rural areas were less likely to smoke.

These differences can be explained by the differences in characteristics of parents in urban and rural areas, particularly because mothers in rural areas tend to be older and better educated than mothers in urban areas.

Parental support

While fewer children living in remote rural areas have at least one grandparent living nearby, the majority of parents in both urban and rural areas said that their child had a close relationship with at least one grandparent. Most parents in both rural and urban areas reported that they would contact family first if they needed someone to look after

their child at short notice. However, parents in rural areas were more likely than urban parents to say that they would call on friends or neighbours first for help.

There is some evidence that children in rural areas have more 'child-rich' social lives. Children in rural areas are taken to visit friends with children more often, and mothers from remote rural areas and rural towns are twice as likely as those in urban areas to attend a parent and toddler group regularly. This may be because of the relative lack of formal childcare in rural areas.

Service use

First-time mothers in remote rural and accessible rural areas were more likely than urban mothers to attend antenatal classes. However, mothers in remote small towns have the lowest rate of antenatal class attendance, with 39% not attending any classes. This was not explained by access difficulties e.g. not having a car.

When it comes to childcare for very young children (aged around 10 months) families in rural areas make less use of childcare than those in urban areas (48% of families in remote rural areas make regular use of childcare compared to 61% of families in urban areas).

Among those families of both babies and toddlers who use childcare, the pattern of service use varies between urban and rural areas. Parents in rural areas are more likely to use childminders and less likely to use nurseries. A high proportion of parents in both urban and rural areas use the child's grandparents to provide care.

Conclusion

In many ways, the early experiences of children living in rural and urban Scotland are not significantly different. Although children in rural areas are slightly more likely than those in urban areas to be born into advantaged circumstances, they may be relatively disadvantaged in other ways, for example by living further from grandparents and in terms of access to some services.

Policy implications

The evidence that children in rural areas are somewhat more likely to live in favourable circumstances and to benefit from positive health behaviours like breastfeeding should not overshadow the evidence that families in rural areas may be relatively disadvantaged in terms of access to both informal support and formal support services.



These findings are based on GUS Sweep 1, which involved interviews with the main carers of 5,217 children aged 10 months old and 2,859 children aged 34 months old, carried out between April 2005 and March 2006.

'Growing Up in Rural Scotland' was written by Lynn Jamieson with Paul Bradshaw and Rachel Ormston. For a copy of the full report please see: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/03/12110107/0>

Responsibility for the opinions expressed in this report, and for all interpretation of the data lies solely with the authors.



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