

## Growing Up in Scotland: Birth Cohort 2

### Parenting a 10-month old child: attitudes, feelings, domestic organisation and activities

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This document presents key findings on parenting from the second birth cohort of the Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) study, surveyed for the first time during 2010/11 when children were aged 10 months. It considers how mothers' attitudes to parenting, feelings and domestic organisation may be shaped by family disadvantage and parenting support; and how all these factors may in turn affect parenting activities and the parent-child relationship. Where possible, comparisons were made with parenting a ten-month old in the first birth cohort, interviewed during 2005/6.

### Main Findings

- Family disadvantage and a lack of social support for parenting were both independently associated with parental attitudes and domestic organisation likely to impair responsive, effective parenting.
- Parenting stress was greater for:
  - Parents without informal parenting support from family or friends
  - Parents in both the most disadvantaged, and the most advantaged groups
- Parents from disadvantaged families were more likely to have negative feelings about parenting (incompetence, resentment, impatience or irritation).
- Family disadvantage and a lack of social support for parenting were both independently associated with less frequent activities important for child development, including:
  - Looking at books/reading stories
  - Singing or saying nursery rhymes
  - Visiting other families with young children
- Almost all (95%) of mothers reported frequently hugging their child.
- Parents from disadvantaged families were less likely to have a warm relationship with their child, and to limit TV viewing to under 2 hours daily.
- Authoritarian attitudes, feeling stressed and domestic disorganisation were associated with lower frequency of activities important for child development. These associations held after taking account of family disadvantage and social support for parenting.
- Differences between the cohorts in parental reading to children (but not in negative feelings) are possibly attributable to increased provision of formal parenting support.

## Parents' attitudes, feelings and domestic organisation

Previous research suggests children's socio-emotional and cognitive development may be affected by parental attitudes, parental feelings, including stress, hostility or perceived lack of confidence and domestic organisation.

GUS assessed these factors via a number of questions asked of parents, 96% of whom were mothers with singleton births.

Authoritarian attitudes were measured using parental agreement with three statements about teaching children to be always obedient and useful, for example: "Children should always obey their parents". Half the parents in the survey were classed as having relatively authoritarian attitudes, meaning that on average they agreed with the importance of teaching children to be always obedient and useful.

Parenting stress was measured using agreement with three statements, for example: "Having a child leaves little time and flexibility in my life". Parents were divided into three approximately equal groups (high, medium and low) based on the average level of stress reported. Parents were also asked about whether they felt annoyance, impatience, resentment or lack of competence when caring for the child. Only 8% of parents reported one or more such negative feelings.

Two aspects of domestic organisation were examined. Home chaos was measured using agreement with three statements, for example: "It's really disorganised in our home". Almost half (47%) either agreed their household was chaotic, or were undecided; the rest disagreed. A second aspect of domestic organisation was measured using agreement with the statement: "Sometimes the television can be on all day in our house even though no-one is necessarily watching it". 45% agreed with this statement.

## How are parental attitudes, feelings and domestic organisation shaped by family disadvantage and social support for parenting?

Indicators of disadvantage, including maternal education, household income and area deprivation, were each associated with more authoritarian attitudes, negative feelings such as incompetence, high home chaos and leaving the TV switched on. Parenting stress was higher in both the most disadvantaged *and* most advantaged groups. Reasons for high stress in advantaged groups are unclear: they may be employment-related, or reflect differences in reporting style.

Two forms of social support for parenting were distinguished: informal (for example, from family or friends) and formal (including organised groups, classes and government-sponsored websites). Less informal support was clearly associated with more parenting stress and home chaos. Those with less formal support reported more authoritarian attitudes, more home chaos and were more likely to leave the TV switched on.

More disadvantaged families generally reported lower levels of both informal and formal parental support. Multivariate analysis therefore investigated whether parental support was related to parental attitudes, feelings and domestic organisation *regardless* of family disadvantage. The analysis also controlled for other important influences (mother's health and number of children in the family).

Allowing for these influences, associations described above between family disadvantage and attitudes, feelings and domestic organisation remained. Regardless of the level of disadvantage, parents without informal parenting support were more stressed and reported more home chaos. Parents without formal parenting support reported more authoritarian attitudes and unrestricted household TV.

## Parenting activities and the parent-child relationship

Parents were asked about the frequency of three important activities with their child: looking at books or reading; singing or saying nursery rhymes; visiting other families with young children. 70% looked at books with their child and 88% sang or said rhymes “every day” or “most days”. Parents were also asked how long their ten-month old child spent watching TV on a typical weekday. A quarter did not watch any at all, 57% watched for up to 2 hours and 18% over 2 hours daily.

Parents were also asked: “How often do you hug or hold (the child) for no reason?”. 95% reported “often” or “always” showing this spontaneous affection, indicating a warm parent-child relationship. Only 5% said they “sometimes”, “rarely” or “never/almost never” showed affection this way.

## Factors shaping parenting activities and the parent-child relationship

Family disadvantage, parental support, parental attitudes, stress, other negative feelings and domestic organisation may all affect parenting behaviours and the parent-child relationship.

Multivariate analysis investigated the associations of these inter-related factors with parenting activities and the parent-child relationship. We also controlled for mother’s health and number of children in the family.

Family disadvantage was associated with less frequent reading, singing and visiting other families, with watching TV for more than 2 hours daily and with a less warm parent-child relationship.

After taking account of disadvantage and other influences, reading, singing and visiting were less frequent when parents were more stressed and had lower levels of domestic organisation. Reading and singing were less frequent, and there was a less warm relationship, when parents had more authoritarian views.

Allowing for family disadvantage, attitudinal and other influences, mothers without informal parental support reported less singing and visiting other families. Absence of formal support was associated with less reading and visiting.

## Comparison with the first birth cohort

Parents of ten-month olds in the second birth cohort, surveyed in 2010/11, were less likely to report any negative feelings relating to incompetence, resentment, annoyance or irritation than parents in the first birth cohort, surveyed in 2005/6 (8% compared to 15%). These differences remained after allowing for between-cohort differences in family circumstances and parental support.

Parents in the second birth cohort were slightly more likely to report looking at books or reading stories every day/most days with their child than parents in the first cohort (71% compared to 67%). The difference remained after taking account of between-cohort differences in family circumstances. However, it disappeared after taking account of higher levels of formal parenting support in the second cohort. Formal parenting support could offer one explanation for the difference in reading between cohorts.

## Conclusion

The findings, based on mothers’ reports, suggest that family disadvantage, parent support, parental attitudes and feelings, and domestic organisational levels may independently contribute to parenting activities that are important for children’s cognitive and socio-emotional development, and to the development of a warm relationship between parent and child. Care should be taken when interpreting these results as they are based on a single (cross-sectional) survey of the second birth cohort.

However, the findings suggest that parenting support may boost both a parent’s own psychological resources and important parenting behaviours, regardless of family disadvantage. Subsequent GUS surveys will allow longitudinal associations between parental attitudes or feelings, parenting behaviours and child development to be examined.

Further information on the Growing Up in Scotland study can be found at: [www.growingupinscotland.org.uk](http://www.growingupinscotland.org.uk)

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