



Growing Up
in Ireland
National Longitudinal
Study of Children

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4TH ANNUAL RESEARCH CONFERENCE

Book of Abstracts



Paper presentations

The importance of longitudinal studies for policy and practice

Lucinda Platt (Millennium Cohort Study)

Keynote speaker

Longitudinal and cohort studies are very valuable resources for addressing questions of relevance to policy and practice. This talk starts by outlining the ways in which longitudinal studies in general and child cohort studies in particular can reveal processes and inform policy in ways that cross-sectional surveys are unable to do. Using examples from across Professor Platt's research career, which cover administrative and linked census data, as well as survey data, the paper then turns to how different sorts of longitudinal sources can be complementary in addressing different types of research question – short and long term – and in enabling research focused on particular sub-populations. The paper then turns to consider the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) specifically. The MCS has surveyed children at 9 months, 3 years, 5 years and 7 years and is currently in the field for the age 11 data collection. It illustrates some of the ways in which this study has influenced policy and been used to inform practice, drawing on findings from earlier in the children's lives, and then demonstrates how the author's recent research has set out to address policy-relevant research questions relating to educational outcomes and the role of parenting and social disadvantage. This research utilises linked educational attainment data, and demonstrates the advantages of combining administrative and survey data. Additionally, the paper discusses the tensions that can arise in attempting to match long-term research agendas embodied by cohort studies to short-term policy goals. It concludes by

considering the future potential both of the age 11 sweep of MCS and the subsequent, age 14, sweep. The author considers how they will be well placed to shed light on the early antecedents of later adolescent outcomes and behaviours that are of intense policy concern and that can have consequences well into adulthood.

Social class of Irish-speaking families and children's behaviour

Ursula Ní Choill, (HRB Centre for Primary Care Research)

Tom O'Dowd, (Trinity College Dublin)

Udo Reulbach, (HRB Centre for Primary Care Research)

Session A, Ballroom 2

Introduction: Many parents, in both the Gaeltacht and in other rural and urban areas speak Irish to their children, often encouraged by the community provided by Gaelscoileanna. The positive effect of bilingualism on a child's cognitive abilities has been well-documented. This study examines the association between the socio-economic background of Irish-speaking families and the child's behaviour.

Methods: The study population of the first wave of the *Growing Up in Ireland* child cohort consisted of 8,568 nine-year-old children. Analysis was based on statistically reweighted data. This study focuses on a comparison between the characteristics of study children whose caregiver(s) mainly spoke Irish to them at home and those who mainly spoke English.

Results: Irish was mainly spoken with 11% [95% CI: 10.3 – 11.6%] of the study children of whom approximately two thirds reside in rural areas. Parents who mainly spoke Irish were from a more affluent and higher educated background than those in non-Irish spoken homes. However, poverty indicators such as having a cold home and not having two pairs of strong shoes were significantly higher. Children whose parents mainly spoke Irish with them had a significantly lower prevalence of abnormal behaviour, particularly with respect to hyperactivity and inattention as assessed by their teachers.

Conclusions: These findings indicate that those who speak Irish to their families constitute a more heterogeneous group than expected. There may also be an association between the language spoken at home and the child's general strengths and difficulties.

Does a healthy immigrant effect exist among Irish-born children?

Emma Ladewig, (Trinity College Dublin)

Tom O'Dowd, (Trinity College Dublin)

Udo Reulbach, (HRB Centre for Primary Care Research)

Session A, Ballroom 2

Introduction: The immigrant population in Ireland has grown substantially during the last decade. While the health of immigrant populations has traditionally been assumed to be poorer than the native population, previous research has found evidence for a 'healthy immigrant effect.' This paper examines the association between infant health and maternal immigrant status in Ireland.

Methods: The study population of the first wave of the *Growing Up in Ireland* infant cohort consisted of 11,134 randomly selected nine month old infants from the Child Benefit Register. Data collection consisted of questionnaires completed with parents in their home. Analysis was based on statistically reweighted data.

Results: Infants from mothers of non-Irish Citizens (C) and mothers not born in Ireland (B) were significantly ($p < 0.001$) less likely of having been seen by a health professional because of ear infections (odds ratio with [95% CI] for C: 0.44 [0.37 – 0.52], for B: 0.57 [0.50 – 0.65]), chest infections (C: 0.53 [0.47 – 0.60]; B: 0.65 [0.58 – 0.72]), or asthma/wheezing (C: 0.30 [0.23 – 0.39]; B: 0.49 [0.41 – 0.60]) when compared to infants from mothers who were Irish Citizens or born in Ireland. These associations remained significant in logistic regression models adjusted for household social class, household income, maternal age, maternal smoking and breastfeeding.

Conclusions: These findings indicate that a 'healthy immigrant effect' may be evident among the infants of immigrants in Ireland. Further research extending these analyses longitudinally using the second wave of data collection from GUI is necessary to identify differences in health outcomes over time.

Factors associated with the Choice of Childcare Provision for a Large Cohort of Irish Mothers

Frances Mc Ginnity (ESRI)

Aisling Murray (ESRI)

Sinéad Mc Nally (Trinity College, Dublin)

Session B, Ballroom 1

This paper examined factors associated with the use of non-parental childcare, and choice of childcare type, among parents of nine month olds in Ireland. Using data from the infant cohort of *Growing Up in Ireland*, parents' decisions regarding the use and type of non-parental care were considered in an eco-behavioural model that allowed for influence from multiple factors, including child, Primary Caregiver, family, and neighbourhood factors. Binomial logistic regression was used to explore the association of these factors with use of non-parental care, and multinomial logistic regression was used to explore the association of these factors with choice of non-parental type of care. Findings highlight that many factors within and external to the family influenced the choices made regarding childcare use. As expected, the key determinant of whether non-parental care was used was the work status of the Primary Caregiver with those who worked full-time more likely to need non-parental care. Family income was another very significant factor affecting use and choice of care. The most influential child factor was the number of siblings: where there were a number of young children requiring care, it was less likely that non-parental care was used; and the care was more likely to be by a professional caregiver. Childcare choice was also found to be associated with proximity of family and the availability of centre-based care, two factors less well explored in childcare research. The paper reflects on the finding in the light of current childcare policy provision for infants in Ireland

The association between crèche care and infants' health

Tom O'Dowd, (Trinity College Dublin)

Dervla Kelly, (Trinity College Dublin)

Udo Reulbach, (HRB Centre for Primary Care Research)

Session B, Ballroom 1

Introduction: The number of infants in centre-based care has been growing steadily in recent years with both parents working outside home. The prevalence increase of infectious diseases may be partially related to the type of child care.

Methods: This study presents findings from the first wave of data collection from the *Growing Up in Ireland* longitudinal cohort study. The sample of 11,134 nine month old infants was randomly selected from the national Child Benefit Register. Data collection consisted of questionnaires completed with the primary caregiver addressing the main type of childcare (in-home-parental, in-home-minder, out-of-home minder, crèche/centre-based) and infant's health. Pearson's Chi Square tests and crude and adjusted logistic regression analyses were used for the analysis which was based on statistically reweighted data.

Results: The risk for children with crèche / centre-based care as main type of childcare of attending a health professional in the past 9 months was significantly increased (all $p < 0.001$) for snuffles / common cold (crude odds ratio: 1.31 [95% CI: 1.16 - 1.48]), chest infection (1.87 [1.65 - 2.11]), ear infection (1.75 [1.52 - 2.02]) and asthma / wheezing (1.60 [1.33-1.92]) when compared to children with other form of child care. After adjustment for socioeconomic and parental risk factors, the relative risk associated with crèche care for an infectious disease was even higher.

Conclusions: A strong association between centre-based care and prevalence of infectious disease in infants was observed. Given high rates of antibiotic prescribing in infant infectious diseases, this is of importance to parents and clinicians.

Growing Up Online: Patterns of ICT use among the nine-year-old cohort

Brian O' Neill, (Dublin Institute of Technology)
Thuy Dinh, (Dublin Institute of Technology)

Session C, Sylvian Suite

Analysis of the first wave of *Growing Up in Ireland* data confirmed the central role that ICTs occupy in the lives of nine-year-olds in Ireland. Findings revealed that 86% of children had access to a computer at home for which most used it (86%) for playing games and other fun activities (48%), as well as for school work (47%) and for accessing online entertainment (28%). ICT use featured prominently in four of five clusters identified among nine year olds' leisure activities (McCoy, Quail, & Smyth, 2012) leading to concerns for digital safety as well as the potential negative impact on health and development (Williams, Greene, & others, 2009). At the same time, digital literacy and e-inclusion are now important policy priorities both at the European (European Commission, 2010) and national level (DCENR, 2009) with increasing attention being given to ICTs across the curriculum (NCCA, 2007) and the potential of digital technologies to enhance literacy levels (Kennedy et al., 2012). In order to examine the preparedness of children to meet these challenges, we conduct a more detailed cluster analysis of ICT activities as reported by children in the nine-year-old cohort. We explore gender and socio-economic factors in ICT use as well as the role played by different parenting styles in determining opportunities for children as they engage with digital technologies. Comparison with EU Kids Online data for nine year olds (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011) provides a wider context in which to assess the benefits and risks of wide-scale proliferation of ICTs among younger children.

Spending Time with Families and Friends: Children's Views on Relationships and Shared Activities

Colette McAuley (Centre for Applied Social Research University of Bradford)

Caroline McKeown (Educational Research Centre St. Patrick's College Dublin)

Brian Merriman (Children's Research Network for Ireland and Northern Ireland)

Session C, Sylvian Suite

Sociologists of childhood have stressed the importance of children's experience in the present and children as agents who actively construct their own lives and influence relationships with family and friends. Current thinking in the field of child well-being emphasises the need to consult children as experts in their own lives. Findings from research with children have led to important insights about what contributes to well-being. Relationships with family and friends have been found to be central to well-being whilst bullying by peers deeply impacts on their well-being. Shared activities appear to be the context for children to not only master competences but also learn about and negotiate relationships.

The *Growing Up in Ireland* interviews with nine year old children were re-analysed with a view to exploring these crucial domains and how they impact on the children's well-being. The children were found to have a wide circle of family connections and were particularly close to their mothers although also close to their fathers. Grandparents played a significant role in their lives and their relationships with siblings were often positive but did fluctuate. Reasons for closeness centred around trust. Lack of availability due to work was a key contributor to children feeling less close to a family member.

The children were involved in a wide range of structured activities after school and at the weekend. This was usually balanced with free time although some 'hurried' children had frenetic lifestyles. Involvement in unstructured activities such as free play was particularly associated with time with friends and choice. Friendship was characterised by sharing and trust. On the other hand, bullying by peers had been experienced by many of the children and almost all were conscious of the danger of becoming bullied. The wider issues of work-family balance and its impact on children, the predominance of bullying and children's right to be heard are reflected upon

Influence of family environment and child gender on academic achievement

Maeve Thornton, (ESRI)

Session D, Ballroom 2

Aim: To explore the extent to which social (economic) factors impact on children's educational outcomes, and whether these processes differ for boys and girls.

Background: Among the major developmental tasks confronting children in middle childhood is the development of various intellectual and academic skills with academic achievement becoming an index of a child's future in a highly competitive world. Since educational outcomes often determine the quality of life that a person will have in the future, correlates of educational success or failure are immensely important to researchers in this area. Much of the literature over recent years has explored gender differences in educational outcomes but there has been much less focus on how correlates of educational achievement differ for boys and girls. This paper explores the associations between social (economic), family context, and child related factors and educational attainment, and how social class and gender might interact to give rise to different outcomes for boys and girls.

Method: Data from the first wave of the 9-year cohort of the *Growing Up in Ireland* will be used to examine the link between social, family environment, and child related factors and educational outcomes in children using the Drumcondra Maths and Reading tests. A series of Regression models will be presented in an attempt to explore the correlates of educational performance and how these might differ by gender.

Self-fulfilling Prophecy? Academic Expectations Among Teachers and Parents of Children with Special Educational Needs

Joanne Banks, (ESRI), Delma Byrne, (NUI, Maynooth), Selina Mc Coy, (ESRI)

Session D, Ballroom 2

Teacher and parent expectations of students and whether these expectations impact on student performance are issues that have received much attention in recent years. Biased perceptions of students by teachers or parents can affect the interactions around academic potential, influence school and classroom placement and impact on the curricular and instructional opportunities offered to students. Research on student expectations often focuses on the impact of low expectations for students from marginalised groups, ethnic minorities or disadvantaged backgrounds. This paper examines whether biased perceptions among teachers and parents may also hold for students identified with a special educational need (SEN); that is teachers and parents may hold lower expectancies for such students than for students without a SEN and these expectations may in turn affect student achievement. Using *Growing Up in Ireland* data on 9-year-olds we examine whether teachers and parents respond to group stereotypes around different types of SEN and consequently underestimate the academic performance of such children, crucially taking account of children's actual performance in standardised tests. Furthermore, in examining children's performance in standardised tests, the data allows us to distinguish between those who are formally and informally identified as having an SEN and provides the opportunity to address issues around standardised testing and children with SEN more generally. This paper provides a

valuable insight into whether parents and teachers underestimate the academic ability of children with SEN, in the process addressing the potential dangers of a SEN label for children and young people.

Behaviour policy in primary schools

Amanda Quail, (ESRI)
Emer Smyth, (ESRI)

Session D, Ballroom 2

Student misbehaviour and the nature of teacher-student interaction have emerged as key factors influencing academic engagement and performance within second-level education. However, to date little has been known about how primary schools deal with student behaviour. This paper takes advantage of the multi-level nature of GUI (wave 1) data on the 9 year old cohort, using: information collected from principals on the frequency with which different forms of discipline are used in the school and individual-level information on the study child's behaviour as perceived by their teacher. The paper will address the following questions:

1. Do different types of primary school vary in levels of misbehaviour among their students?
2. Are these differences related to the gender and social composition of students in the school?
3. What measures are used by schools to address student misbehaviour and to what extent do these behaviour policies differ by school type and student intake?

In addressing these issues, the paper will contribute to the understanding of school climate and help inform policy and practice within the primary sector.

Family Structure and Children's Achievement:

Anne-Marie Brooks,
(Dept. Of Children and Youth Affairs)

Session E, Ballroom 1

The influence of family structure on child outcomes has been extensively researched. The conclusions drawn from most studies suggest that when compared to children living in a so called 'traditional' family structure, life in 'non-traditional' family structures is associated with a host of poor outcomes for children. Some of these effects are short-lived, pronounced only during a period of transition (e.g. parental divorce or remarriage) while other effects are more enduring and persist well into adulthood. Results from two recent meta-analyses corroborate these findings (Amato, 2001; Chapple, 2009). The extent to which family structure per se is responsible for producing these results however continues to remain unclear. Poorer outcomes are not a uniform consequence for all children living in 'non-traditional' family structures. Similarly, a traditional family structure offers no guarantee of a happy, healthy, well-adjusted child. There are multiple influences at play.

This paper uses *Growing Up in Ireland* data to explore the association between family structure and children's achievement. It will also examine the extent to which individual, familial, school and neighbourhood factors mediate this association.

For the purpose of this analysis, a five-fold family structure classification (i.e. intact married families; intact cohabiting families; continuously single-mother families; divorced or separated single-mother families, and stepfather families) will be used alongside other salient family structure characteristics including family size, sibling structure and the presence of a co-resident grandparent.

A Comparison of Stepmother and Stepfather Families in Ireland

Kristin Hadfield, (Trinity College Dublin)
Elizabeth Nixon, (Trinity College Dublin)

Session E, Ballroom 1

Although an increasing proportion of people in Ireland are living in stepfamilies, little research has explored their intra-family dynamics. Stepfamilies are not a homogenous group and, because family processes are more strongly related to child outcomes than family structures, research has pointed to the utility of focusing on structures and processes within these families. Previous research indicates that stepmothers may have more problematic stepparent-stepchild relationships and feel more stressed than stepfathers. Stepchildren in these families may also have difficulties related to their stepmother's likelihood of taking on a parental role. Drawing on data from the Growing Up in Ireland study (9-year-old cohort), this paper aims to compare family processes within stepmother (n = 89) and stepfather families (n = 295). No stepfathers were primary caregivers to their stepchild(ren) whereas stepmothers tended to assume this role. Stepmothers were less romantically happy than either stepfathers or biological mothers in stepfather families, and experienced more interparental conflict than stepfathers. They also had less close and more conflicted relationships with their stepchild(ren) than mothers in stepfather families. Children in stepmother families experienced more negative life events and were rated as having more difficulties by both their primary caregiver and their teacher than children in stepfather families. These findings are in line with previous research and point to the applicability of international research to stepfamilies in Ireland. Stepmother families may face particular challenges and may benefit from directed parenting and relationship support.

Multidimensional poverty and well-being among nine-year-olds in Ireland

James Williams, (ESRI)

Aisling Murray, (ESRI)

Christopher T. Whelan, (UCD)

Session E, Ballroom 1

A large proportion of poverty research has historically focused on relative income or a combination of relative income and a range of non-monetary consumption indicators. This method has been adopted over many years in Ireland (e.g. Whelan and Maitre (2010)). More recent recognition of the multiple causes and consequences of poverty has seen an increase in the literature on multidimensional approaches to measurement. These multiple dimensions include household and individual characteristics such as health, literacy, life expectancy, nutritional status, local provision of public services, housing, general environmental quality and so on (as outlined in, for example, Nolan and Whelan (2007), Atkinson (2003), Alkire and Foster (2011a, 2011b), Bourguignon and Chakravarty (2003), Tsui (2002), Deutsch and Silber (2005)).

A major advantage of the application multidimensional methods to individual survey data is that, in principle, it allows one to focus on variations in the experience of poverty and well-being among specific sub-groups within households, including among children. However, data used to generate income-based measures usually do not have sufficient detail on intra-household distribution to allow for investigation of the experience of poverty among sub-groups within the household. In this regard, the increasing availability of data from child cohort studies facilitates the extension of the multidimensional approach.

This paper uses data for 9-year-olds and their families from the national longitudinal study of

children in Ireland (the *Growing up in Ireland* study) to examine multidimensional aspects of childhood poverty and well-being.

This paper considers a measure of child poverty and well-being based on a number of domains including relative income poverty status and economic strain; work intensity in the family; the child's physical and emotional health status; measures of deviant and problematic behaviours; school performance; nature and quality of the local neighbourhood; exposure to parental risk behaviours. The approach taken is based on Alkire and Foster (2011) extension of the Foster Greer and Thorbecke class of poverty indices.

The paper presents results of an analysis documenting headcount, intensity and adjusted head count ratios. It also provides a decomposition of multidimensional poverty by dimension overall and by socio-economic group. Finally, it provides a multivariate analysis of the impact of a variety of socio-economic factors on the adjusted head count ratio.

A Socioeconomic Profile of Childhood Disability in Ireland: Evidence from the *Growing Up in Ireland* Survey

Áine Roddy, (NUI, Galway)

John Cullinan, (NUI, Galway)

Session F, Sylvian Suite

International studies on the economics of childhood disability suggest that the extra caring demands associated with raising a child with a disability tend to lead to greater socioeconomic disadvantage at a household level. In particular, these households face significant additional direct and indirect economic costs, which leave them exposed to higher incidences of poverty, deprivation and debt. Understanding the extent and impact of this economic burden is important for formulating policies that seek to improve the

well-being of children with a disability. Despite this, no research to date has fully explored the economic impact of childhood disabilities in Ireland. Within this context, this paper investigates the socioeconomic circumstances of families caring for a child with a disability. It uses data from the first wave of the 9-year-old cohort of the *Growing Up in Ireland* survey and examines the association between the disability status of households and a range of socioeconomic outcomes including labour force participation, educational attainment, social class, making ends meet and household income. Overall the results suggest that households with a child with a disability have lower levels of household income and face a greater degree of difficulty in making ends meet. In addition, primary carers who have a child with a disability are less likely to participate in the labour force and to have a third level qualification, while they are also more likely to have to turn down work opportunities because of family responsibilities.

Inequality of multimorbidity and onset of chronic illness in Irish infants and children

Udo Reulbach, (HRB Centre for Primary Care Research)

Tom O' Dowd, (Trinity College Dublin)

Session F, Sylvian Suite

Introduction: Recent research findings have challenged the single-disease approach by which most health care is configured. Socioeconomic deprivation is linked to having two or more illnesses (multimorbidity) in the same person in adulthood, while research regarding multimorbidity in infancy and childhood is still sparse.

Methods: Diseases were coded using the International Classification of Diseases. The analysis was based on statistically reweighted

data from the first waves of the nine-month-old and the 9-year-old cohorts of *Growing Up in Ireland* using multivariate logistic regression models.

Results: In general, children from a disadvantaged socioeconomic background had a significantly poorer general health when compared to those from more affluent families. In addition, those children acquired their chronic illness significantly earlier and in greater numbers when compared to children from a more affluent background. This trend was reflected in findings based on the infant cohort which indicated a higher multimorbidity rate in infants from disadvantaged families when compared to those from more affluent families.

Conclusions: Multimorbidity or the presence of two or more illnesses in the same person starts at a young age and is strongly influenced by socioeconomic status. This study completes an emerging picture of more deprived families coping with multiple illnesses from childhood through adulthood into old age. It has implications for the provision of clinical care to children.

Child Injuries in Ireland: Risk Factors Related to Family, School, Neighbourhood, and the Child

Ela Polek, (University College Dublin)

Session F, Sylvian Suite

Accidents and injuries are the leading cause of mortality and morbidity of children in Europe and the United States. This study aims to identify key risk and prevention factors of child injuries related to immediate environment (parental and household characteristics), broader environment (school, neighbourhood characteristics) and child characteristics (emotional and behavioural difficulties) in a sample of 8568 of 9-year olds in

Ireland. Secondly, we aim to contribute to the ongoing debate of whether or not repeated injuries among children can be seen as accident-proneness. While meta-analytic methods suggest that accident proneness might be a research artefact, other studies suggest that repeated injuries among children are associated with family problems such as dysfunctional parenting (or lack of sufficient supervision) or might be related to child emotional and behavioural difficulties. To address the question of whether or not accident proneness is an actual phenomenon, we test if repeated injuries (thus accident proneness) and single injuries (thus incidental injuries) are differently related to the set of predictors. Further, we examine differences between groups of children by comparing those who have never been injured, those who had one injury, two injuries, and three or more injuries. We also address the question: what are the risk factors of the most severe injuries (such as repeated bone fractures) among 9-year olds and we discuss policy implications of current results.

Adverse Life Events and Socio-emotional Outcomes

Mark Morgan, (Trinity College, Dublin)

James Williams, (ESRI)

Session G, Ballroom 2

Children and adolescents' lives are filled with various challenges ranging from normal daily hassles (like sibling disagreement) to chronic stressors (like poverty). One of the focal points of GUI is on events which have the potential to be traumatic and/or exert a major change in the life-experiences of the participants. These include death of a parent, divorce separation of parents, serious illness or injury and less dramatic events like moving house or their home being broken into.

The extant literature demonstrates dramatic variability in the responses of children to such events. One estimate is that of the potentially traumatic events occurring less than 10% result in post-traumatic stress disorder. This finding has resulted in an examination of the factors that promote resilience, that is, effects are less than might be expected given the nature of the events in question.

GUI will allow for an examination of the effects of adverse events with a particular focus on the following: (i) How important is the number of events that a child experiences? (ii) How are these effects moderated by social background and related variables? (iii) What kind of factors promote resilience? For example is success in school an important interacting factor? (iv) Are there factors that exacerbate the impact of events?

In the effort to answer these questions, we will rely mainly on the Strengths and Difficulties (SDQ) questionnaire since this instrument measures the main outcomes in the realm of socio-emotional development. Information on moderating factors like school achievement, social background and experiences with peers is also available in the study. The results will have important implications for understanding events that impact on a large number of young people.

The Prevalence of Speech and Language Impairment among a Nationally Representative Sample of Irish Nine-Year-Olds

Zoe Rooke, (University College Cork)
Ciara O' Toole, (University College Cork)
Fiona Gibbon, (University College Cork)

Session G, Ballroom 2

Background. Speaking and understanding spoken language are core mediums by which knowledge is imparted and relationships formed (McCormack, Harrison, McLeod & McAllister, 2011). For children with speech and language impairments facility in these areas is compromised, often resulting in far-reaching consequences for both children and their carers. Determining the prevalence of these conditions is therefore of paramount importance to service planning and delivery, both in health and educational sectors. Despite this, there are currently no prevalence estimates available for Irish children. Research in Australia has utilized data from a national survey, and has confirmed a high-prevalence with a concomitant need for targeted intervention and long-term support. *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI) offers a comparable data source and poses an invaluable opportunity to establish whether unique or complementary trends exist within the Irish context.

Method. Questionnaires from wave one of the GUI child cohort were reviewed and information from three sources; primary caregiver reports, teacher reports and direct assessment, were investigated to determine the prevalence of speech and language impairments.

Findings. 7.8% of mother's reported some level of concern for their child's speech and language. A similar prevalence rate was found according to teacher ratings of oral language (9.5%) and the proportion of children who fell under -1.5 SD

below the mean on direct assessment (6.9%). In contrast only 1.9% of children were identified as having a diagnosis and 1.7% were receiving in-school services.

Conclusions. Speech and language impairments are high prevalence conditions among Irish Nine-Year-Olds warranting efficient assessment procedures and support through the middle years of primary education.

The Effect of User Fees On The Utilisation of GP Services by Children

Anne Nolan, (ESRI)
Richard Layte, (ESRI)

Session G, Ballroom 2

Unlike many other European countries, the majority of the Irish population pay the full out-of-pocket price of a GP visit, with only those on low incomes exempt. Essentially, there are three categories of eligibility for free primary care in Ireland: those on low incomes ('medical card') are entitled to free GP services and heavily subsidised prescription medicines, those on low but not the lowest incomes ('GP visit card') are entitled to free GP services but not prescription medicines, while the remainder ('private') must pay in full for GP services and prescription medicines. There is an extensive literature which has analysed the impact of this system on GP visiting rates among adults in Ireland. However, there is a lack of evidence for children, largely due to the absence of appropriate micro-data. Given the importance of socio-economic health inequalities in shaping the future outcomes of children, it is important to analyse the extent to which the current system of eligibility is leading to differences in access to GP services, differences that cannot be explained by health need. In addition, private health insurance plans are increasingly offering part cover for GP expenses, which adds an additional layer of complexity to

the system of eligibility, and to date, this has not been studied by Irish researchers. Using a large, nationally-representative data-set covering two cohorts of Irish children (9-month olds and 9-year olds), we examine the role of eligibility for free GP care in determining GP visiting rates among Irish children, and find significant effects.

Measured parental weight status and familial socio-economic status correlates with childhood overweight and obesity at age 9

Eimear Keane, Janas Harrington, Ivan Perry
Patricia Kearney, (University College Cork)
Richard Layte, (ESRI)

Session H, Ballroom 1

Background/Aim: A combination of family factors including parental weight and socio-economic status are likely determinants of childhood obesity. This present research aims to examine the association between measured parental weight status, familial socio-economic factors and risk of childhood obesity.

Methods: Cross sectional analysis of the first wave (2008) of the child cohort. Data were re-weighted to account for sampling design. Parents and children had anthropometric measurements taken using standards methods. Forward stepwise multinomial logistic regression was conducted to determine the risk of childhood overweight and obesity using International Obesity Taskforce definitions.

Results: One in four children were either overweight (19.3%) or obese (6.6%). Parental obesity was a significant predictor of child obesity. Overall, 14.4% of children with normal weight parents were overweight or obese compared with 46.2% of children with obese parents. Maternal education and household class

were more consistently associated with a higher child body mass index category than household income. Adjusted regression indicates that children with an obese single/2 obese parents had 15 times the odds of being obese (95% CI, 8.4-27.7) than those with normal weight parents.

Conclusion: Parental weight appears to be the most influential factor driving the childhood obesity epidemic in Ireland. To address the obesity epidemic across the life-course, primary prevention through positive lifestyle choices is essential. Given the unequivocal diet-obesity relationship, it is crucial to further explore the determinants of poor diet. This would contribute to the evidence base for public policy, health promotion and clinical practice on obesity prevention and management.

Some psycho-social implications of obesity among nine-year old children.

Mark Ward, (Trinity College Dublin),
Evelyn Mahon, (Trinity College Dublin),
Richard Layte, (ESRI)

Session H, Ballroom 1

Obesity is recognised as having negative health and psycho-social implications for children. While much discussion to date has focused on the perceived causes of this phenomenon the current paper looks at the relationship between children's weight status and two aspects of their psycho-social well-being: temperament and self-concept. Some temperamental characteristics are associated with an increased vulnerability to weight gain; and obesity can have a detrimental effect on children's self-concept.

The sample analysed was the cohort of nine-year-old children (N=8,570; response 57%) from the first wave of the GUI study. Using the guidelines proposed by the International Obesity Task Force (IOTF), children were classified as obese (7%),

overweight (19%) or normal weight (75%) based on their measured BMI. The children's perception of their own weight status was also considered.

Utilising the EAS Temperament Questionnaire and the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale it was found that overweight (including obese) children scored worse on the emotionality and activity temperament sub-scales. Being overweight was also found to have a significantly negative impact on children's self-concept with different effects among boys and girls.

The relationship between sedentary behaviour and overweight/obesity in nine year old children

Dervla Kelly (Trinity College Dublin)

Udo Reulbach, (HRB Centre for Primary Care Research)

Tom O' Dowd, (Trinity College Dublin)

Session H, Ballroom 1

Introduction: One in every four 9-year-olds in Ireland is overweight. It is disputed whether sedentary activities such as computer use and watching television are underlying factors of rising obesity levels. The objective of this study was to determine the association between recreational activities and weight.

Methods: The analysis is based on statistically reweighted data from the 9-year-old cohort of *Growing Up in Ireland* of 8,568 nine-year-olds and their families. Data collection included self-completion surveys with children and parents. Weight and height measurements were taken by interviewers for 95% of the sample (n=8,136).

Results: Of the study population, 26.6% were overweight (95% CI: 28.1 – 30.1%). Time spent watching television and DVDs/videos was significantly associated with being overweight ($\chi^2= 69.0$; $df = 5$; $p<0.001$) whereas time spent playing computer games was not associated with

being overweight. Having a television and/or DVD/video player in the bedroom was also associated with being overweight ($\chi^2= 43.0$; $df = 1$; $p<0.001$). One fifth of children played computer games for one hour or more, while two thirds watched television for one to three hours every day.

Time spent playing sports was significantly associated with being overweight for boys but not for girls ($\chi^2= 28.0$; $df = 3$; $p<0.001$).

Conclusions: Using a television in the bedroom to play computer games may not be associated with being overweight but using it to watch television and DVDs/videos was linked to overweight. Longitudinal studies will enable researchers to understand the potential causal relationship between recreational activities and obesity from confounding variables.



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

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