INFANT COHORT
AT 5 YEARS
NOV 2013

Growing Up in Ireland
National Longitudinal Study of Children

GROWING UP IN IRELAND

KEY FINDINGS: INFANT COHORT (at 5 years)

NO. 4
THE FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES OF FIVE-YEAR-OLDS

INTRODUCTION

This is the fourth in a series of *Key Findings* from the third wave of interviews with the Infant Cohort from ***Growing Up in Ireland***, when the Study Child was five years of age. The families of around 11,100 children were initially interviewed in 2008/2009 when the Study Children were nine months old. They were re-interviewed between January and August 2011 when the children were three years of age, and between March and September 2013 when they were five years old. This Key Finding presents descriptive information on the family circumstances of five-year-olds and how these have changed since the two earlier interviews.

In a child's early years, the nature and situation of their family – such as its structure, composition and financial circumstances – have immediate as well as enduring effects on the child's well-being and development. Ireland, as elsewhere, has experienced a great deal of social and economic change in the last decade. This has included changes in family form as well as changes in the economy. The latter have had particularly strong effects on families since the onset of the recession in 2008.

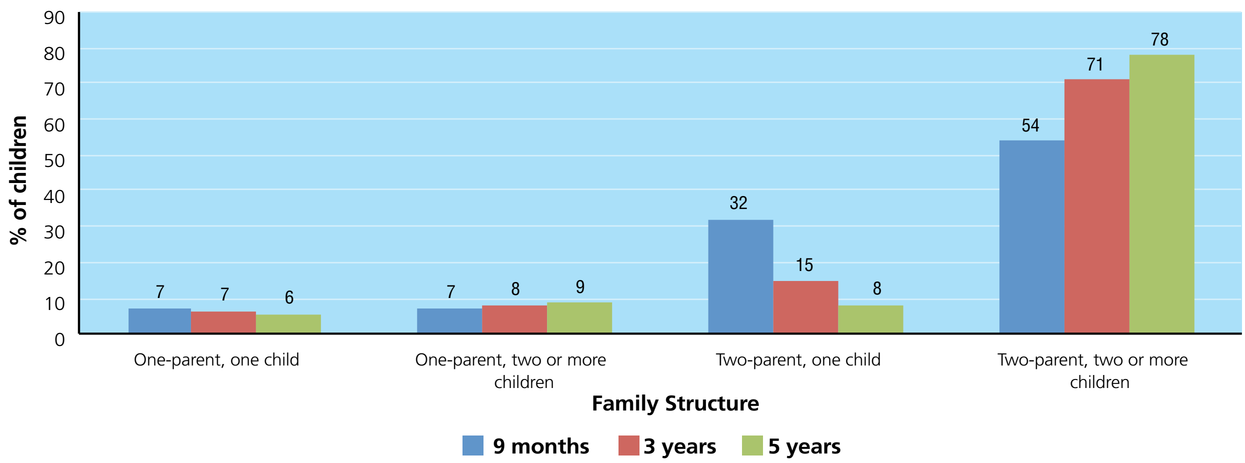
An Irish Government Funded Initiative

FAMILY STATUS OF FIVE-YEAR-OLDS

The majority of five-year-olds lived in two-parent families. The proportions of one- and two-parent families have generally remained the same over the five years of *Growing Up in Ireland*.

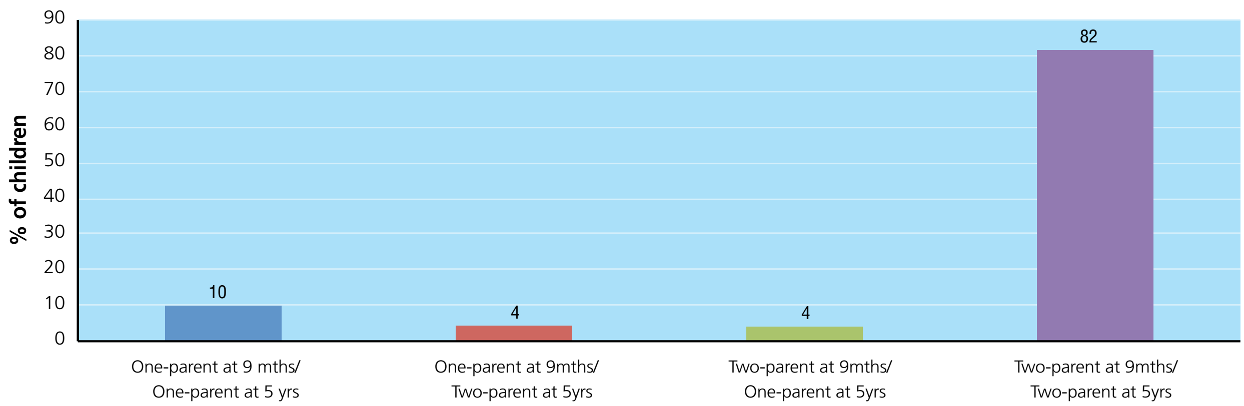
- 86% of five-year-olds lived in two-parent families, the remainder in one-parent families.
- For 98% of five-year-olds, the Primary Caregiver in the home was their mother. For just over 1% it was their father.
- In just over 98% of two-parent families, the Secondary Caregiver was the five-year-old's biological father.
- The average age of the five-year-old's mother was 36.2 years. Their resident fathers were aged 39.2 years on average.
- The percentage of children living in one- and two-parent families remained generally stable from when the children were nine months old, through three to five years of age; 14% to 15% of children were living in one-parent families at each age (Figure 1). The increase in the percentage of larger families reflects the birth of siblings over the period.

Figure 1: Percentage of children in one- and two-parent families at nine months, three years and five years of age



- Although the overall proportions of one- and two-parent families were fairly constant between nine months and five years, there were some changes worthy of note: 4% of children had changed from a one- to a two-parent family, while a counterbalancing 4% had changed in the opposite direction, from a two- to a one-parent family (Figure 2).

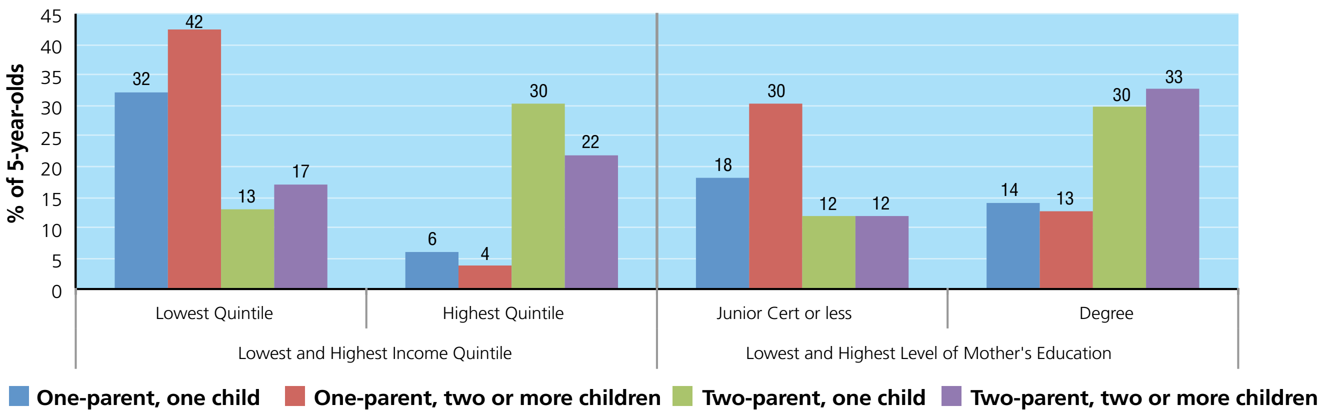
Figure 2: Changes in family structure between nine months and five years of age



One-parent families were the most socially disadvantaged.

- Children in one-parent families were the most disadvantaged in terms of household income[1] and maternal education.
- When the children were five years old, the proportion of one-parent families that fell into the lowest income group was more than double that of two-parent families. For example, 42% of larger one-parent families were in the lowest income group compared with 17% of larger two-parent families (Figure 3). (Household income was divided into five equal groups, or quintiles, from the bottom 20% to the highest 20%).
- The proportion of mothers in two-parent families who had a degree was more than twice that among one-parent families (Figure 3).

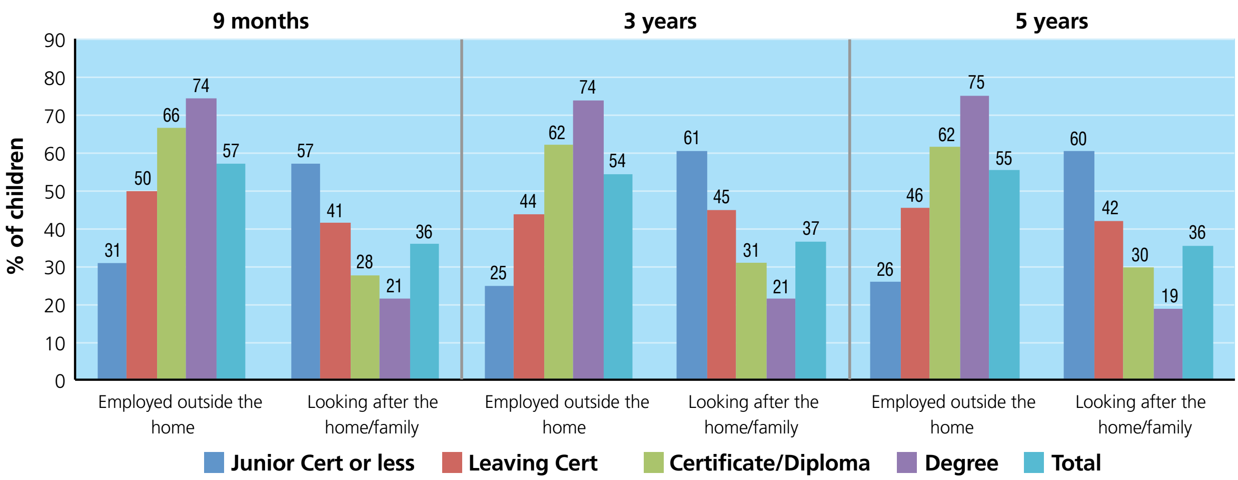
Figure 3: Five-year-olds in different family types according to highest and lowest levels of (a) household income and (b) mother's education



Just over half of mothers of five-year-olds were employed outside the home.

- The mothers of 55% of five-year-olds were employed outside the home; 36% described themselves as primarily *looking after the home/family* (Figure 4), while a further 5% described themselves as *unemployed* and a final 5% as *other* (not shown in Figure 4).
- Overall, Figure 4 shows that the percentage of mothers *employed outside the home* and the percentage *looking after the home/family* remained relatively stable between nine months and five years of age. At nine months, 57% of mothers were primarily *employed outside the home* and 36% were primarily *looking after the home/family*.
- At nine months, three years and five years, mothers with lower levels of education were the most likely to be *looking after the home/family* and the least likely to be employed.

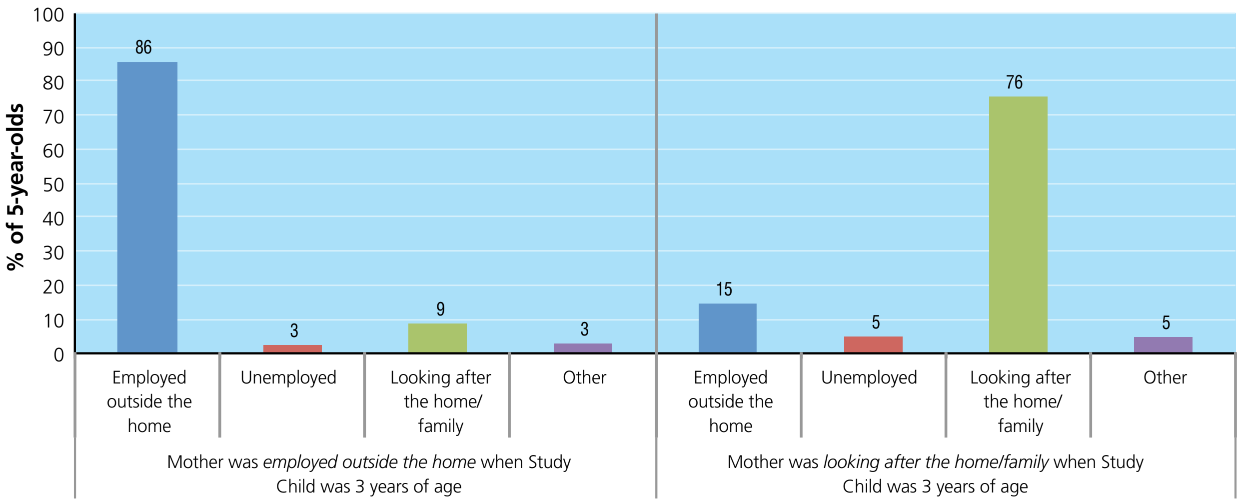
Figure 4: Relationship between mother's employment and her education when the Study Child was nine months, three years and five years of age



[1] Equivalised income is used, to account for differences in size and age structure of families.

- Figure 5 shows the extent to which the employment situation of *individual* mothers of young children changed over time. The majority (86%) of those *employed* outside the home when the Study Child was three years of age were still employed at five years. However, 9% had moved from employment to *looking after the home/family.*
- Similarly, 15% of those who had described themselves as *looking after the home/family* when the child was three years of age were *employed* when s/he was five years of age. Just under 76% of those who described themselves as *looking after the home/family* at three were still doing so at five years.

Figure 5: Employment status of mother when child was five years of age compared to status at three years



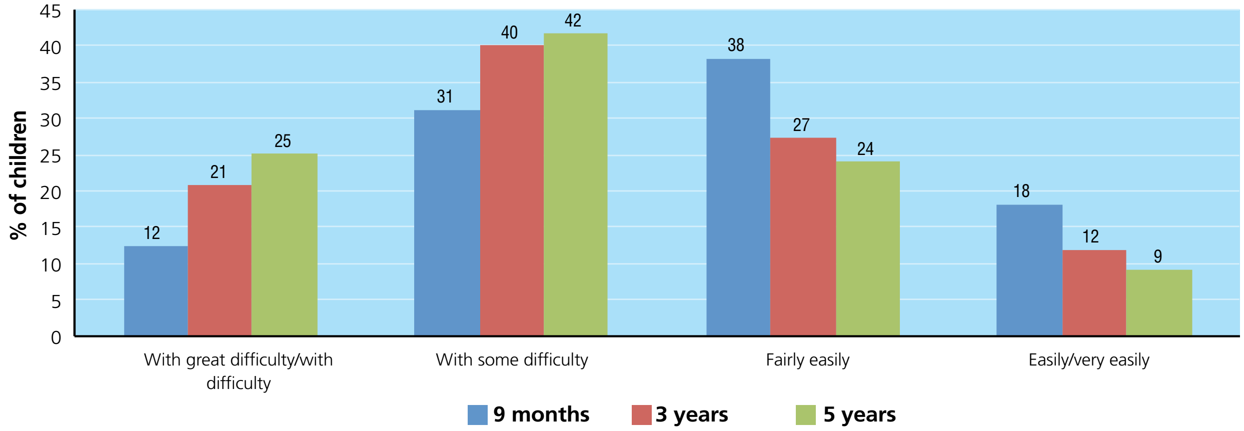
DIFFICULTIES MAKING ENDS MEET

Increasing proportions of families with young children were experiencing difficulties in making ends meet.

Mothers were asked to describe how difficult their family was finding it to make ends meet, using the following categories: *with great difficulty; with difficulty; with some difficulty; fairly easily; easily;* and *very easily.*

- Given the economic recession of recent years it is not surprising that an increasing number of families said they were experiencing difficulties in making ends meet (Figure 6). Twice as many families said they were making ends meet with *great difficulty/with difficulty* at five years of age than at nine months (25% compared to 12%).

Figure 6: Percentage of families recording varying levels of difficulty in making ends meet when the Study Child was nine months, three years and five years of age



- By five years of age, 67% of children were in families experiencing some level of difficulty in making ends meet (Figure 6). This compares, for example, with 61% when the Study Children were three years of age and with 43% when they were nine months.

Some families persistently experienced difficulties in making ends meet when the Study Child was nine months, three years and five years of age.

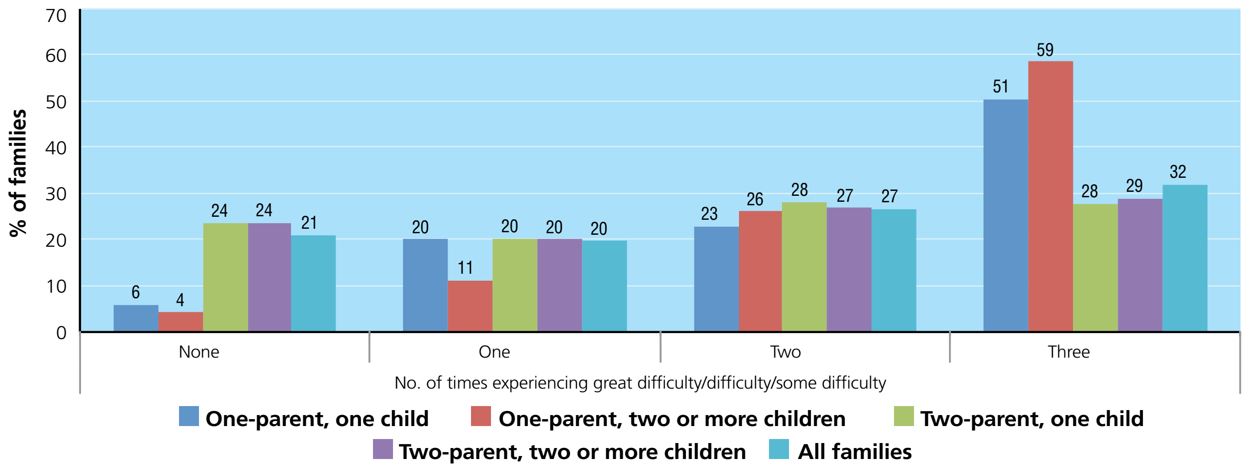
- Table 1 shows the proportion of families who were experiencing *great difficulty; difficulty;* or *some difficulty* in making ends meet at all three ages (32%), at none of the ages (21%), or at some ages but not others.
- 59% of families with a five-year-old experienced some level of difficulty in making ends meet in at least two waves of the survey.

Table 1: Families of five-year-olds classified by number of interviews in which they recorded making ends meet *with great difficulty; with difficulty;* or *with some difficulty.*

No. of interviews when experiencing *great difficulty/difficulty/some difficulty*	% of families with five-year-olds
None	21%
One	20%
Two	27%
Three	32%
Total	*100%*

- Compared to two-parent families, much higher percentages of one-parent families (large and small) persistently recorded difficulties in making ends meet across all three time periods (Figure 7). Just over 55% of one-parent families experienced financial stress at all three time periods compared to 29% of two-parent families.

Figure 7: Families of five-year-olds classified by family type and number of interviews in which they recorded making ends meet *with great difficulty; with difficulty;* or *with some difficulty.*

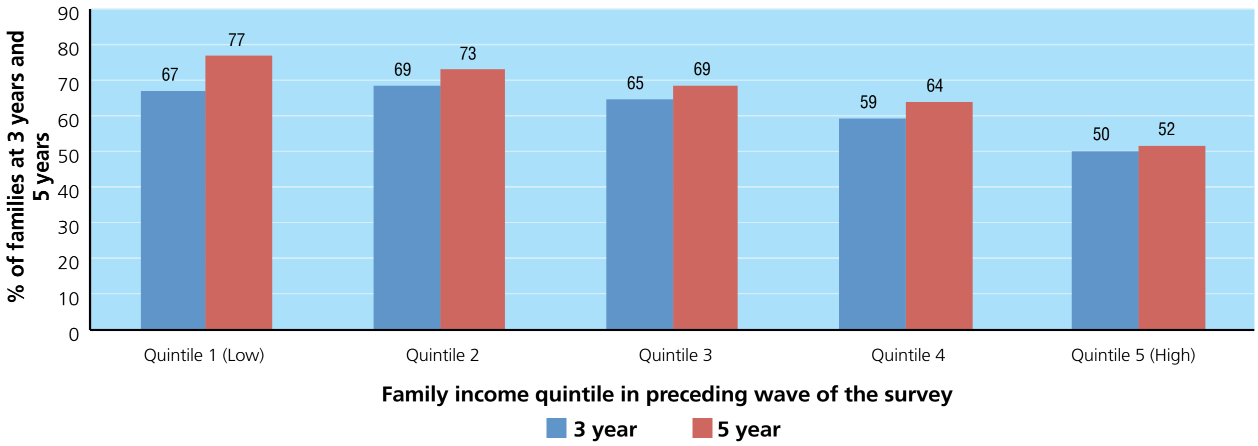


THE ECONOMIC RECESSION

The recession continued to have a substantial impact on over two-thirds of families with a five-year-old. In the surveys when the children were three and (subsequently) five years of age, the Study Child's mother was asked whether or not the recession had had an effect on their family since the previous interview. A four-point scale was used: *very significant effect; significant effect; small effect; no effect at all.*

- When the child was five years old, 67% of families said the recession had had a *very significant* or *significant effect* on them since their previous interview. This compares with 62% when the child was three years of age.
- Families who were most socially disadvantaged (in terms of income, education, etc. were most likely to report that the recession had had a *very significant* or *significant effect* on them. This is illustrated (based on family income) in Figure 8.
- Even in the highest income quintile, more than 50% of families experienced a *very significant* or *significant effect* of the recession between the two time periods.
- Between when the child was three years and five years of age, there was a bigger increase in the percentage of families reporting *very significant* or *significant effects* of the recession for the lowest income quintile (67% to 77%) than for the highest income quintile (50% to 52%) (Figure 8).

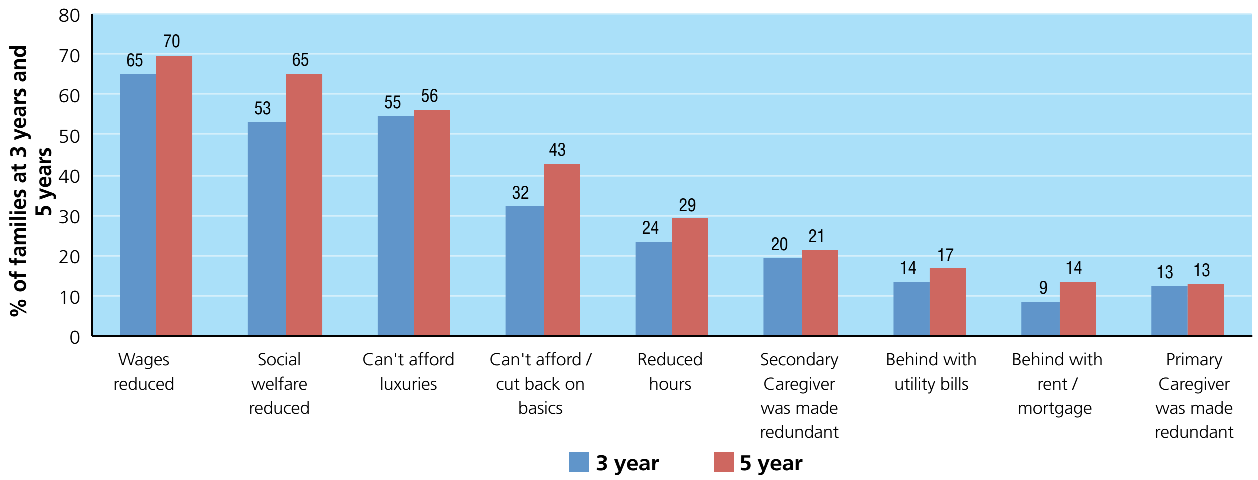
Figure 8: Percentage of families reporting that the recession had had a *very significant* or *significant effect* on them at three years and five years



The mothers of Study Children who recorded that the recession had had an adverse effect on their family were asked to indicate (from a list of nine items) all the ways in which it had affected them.

- The most frequently recorded effects at five years of age included *reduction in wages* (70%); *reduction in social welfare* (65%); and *can't afford luxuries* (56%) (Figure 9).
- The proportion of families who reported being unable to afford specific bills/items increased since the child was three years (Figure 9). The percentage of families who *couldn't afford/cut back on basics* increased from 32% to 43%. The percentage who were *behind with utility bills* increased from 14% to 17%, and the percentage *behind with rent/mortgage* increased from 9% to 14%.

Figure 9: Effects of the recession on the Study Child's family at three years and five years



SUMMARY

Economic factors, such as the recession, appear to have had a major impact on families with young children, while social factors such as family structure, have been largely stable. The financial difficulties experienced by families have been both pervasive and persistent.

The majority of five-year-olds (82%) have lived in two-parent families at both nine months and five years of age. The percentage of young children in one- and two-parent families was fairly constant between nine months, three years and five years, although some children experienced change in family structure: 4% of children changed from a one- to a two-parent family between nine months and five years of age. There was a counterbalancing flow of the same magnitude from two- to one-parent families.

One-parent families were most disadvantaged in terms of family income at each stage, from nine months through three to five years of age. The mother's level of education in one-parent families was also much lower than that of mothers in two-parent families.

Approximately 55% of the mothers of five-year-olds were primarily *employed outside the home*, while 36% were primarily *looking after the home/family.*

In light of the severe economic recession of recent years, it is not surprising that the percentage of families experiencing financial strain increased. Financial stress over the period in question was most persistent in one-parent families. Over half had persistently experienced difficulties in making ends meet since the Study Child was nine months of age.

The income of families had fallen due to loss of jobs and reduced wages, hours and social welfare. This had major effects on expenditures for rent, utility bills and basics. Just over two-thirds of families with a five-year-old said that the recession had had a *significant* or *very significant* effect on them since their child was three years of age. Large percentages recorded that they were unable to afford or had to cut back on basic items, including the rent, mortgage and utility bills. The percentage of families recording these problems had increased between the time when the child was three and five years.

Growing Up in Ireland is the National Longitudinal Study of Children. It tracks the development of two nationally representative cohorts of children: an Infant Cohort, interviewed initially at nine months and subsequently at three and five years of age, and a Child Cohort, interviewed initially at nine years of age and subsequently at 13.

The study is funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, in association with the Department of Social Protection and the Central Statistics Office. It is being carried out by a consortium of researchers led by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD).

The first wave of fieldwork with the families of the Infant Cohort involved around 11,100 nine-month-olds, their parents and carers. Interviews began in September 2008 and were completed in March 2009. The second wave of interviews with this cohort (at three years of age) took place between January and August 2011, and the third wave of interviews (at five years of age) was completed between March and September 2013. The response rates in both the second and third waves were 90%.

Access to *Growing Up in Ireland* data

An anonymised version of all quantitative and qualitative data collected in ***Growing Up in Ireland*** is being made available through the Irish Social Science Data Archive (ISSDA) (http://www.ucd.ie/issda/data/growingupinireland/) and the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA) (http://www.iqda.ie/content/growing-ireland).

Thank you to all participants

The success of ***Growing Up in Ireland*** is the result of contributions from a large range of individuals, organisations and groups, many of whom helped to recruit the sample and collect the data. We are particularly grateful to the thousands of families from every part of the country who gave so generously of their time on three occasions to make this study possible. A very big 'thank you' to the children and their families.

(The figures presented in this Key Finding are purely descriptive. They do not control for potential interactions or confounding effects. All figures are preliminary and may be subject to change.)

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

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Department of Children and Youth Affairs