



Growing Up
in Ireland
National Longitudinal
Study of Children

Growing Up in Ireland

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Book of Abstracts



Paper presentations

Keynote Address

An equal start: the importance of evidence from longitudinal studies to support children's healthy development

Keynote speaker

Professor Yvonne Kelly

(University College London) and (ICLS)

Hogan Mezzanine Theatre

It is well established that what happens in the early years of life has long-lasting consequences for health and social success across the lifespan. Stark social inequalities in children's health and development exist and emerge early in life. It is therefore crucial to identify potential tipping points and opportunities for intervention during childhood with the potential to affect change and improve life chances.

Efforts to improve child health and development benefit from carefully designed analyses of observational data particularly when experimental designs are unethical such as during pregnancy and the early months of life. For example, the benefits of breastfeeding with its different social distributions over time - 1950s compared with 2000s, and across country settings - Brazil compared with Britain, have been identified and have provided compelling evidence for policy development. This talk will discuss findings that have so far informed policy development from the most recent of the British 'birth' cohort studies – the Millennium Cohort Study (for example research on alcohol consumption during

pregnancy, breastfeeding and the introduction of solid foods, the physical punishment of children, childhood obesity, reading to children in the early years, and sleep patterns throughout childhood). Ongoing work with the potential to inform future policy challenges such as alcohol consumption during youth, and social media use and young people's mental health will also be highlighted.

A brief biographical note on the Keynote speaker:

Yvonne Kelly is Professor of Lifecourse Epidemiology at University College London (UCL). She has published extensively over the past 20 years in the area of child and adolescent health and development. Professor Kelly is Associate Director of the ESRC funded International Centre for Lifecourse Studies in Society and Health (ICLS), and is Director of the ESRC-BBSRC Soc-B Centre for Doctoral Training in biosocial research. She leads a large programme of research on children and young people's health and development, including the following areas of focus:

- Improving our understanding about the causes and consequences of socioeconomic and ethnic inequalities in health with particular attention to the underlying pathways and the processes at play.
- The uptake and retention of health related behaviours including drinking, smoking and physical activity.
- The influences of family and broader social contexts for healthy development.

Session A: Hogan Mezzanine Theatre

Shaping educational expectations: a longitudinal analysis

Emer Smyth (ESRI)

Session A, Hogan Mezzanine Theatre

Context: Educational expectations and the way in which they shape actual outcomes act as an important vehicle for the intergenerational reproduction of social inequality. In Ireland, where higher education is now the dominant route among school leavers, low educational expectations are likely to be a signal of longer term difficulties in educational achievement and post-school transitions.

Methods: This paper draws on the first two waves of the GUI Child Cohort. At both waves, the primary care-giver was asked how far they expected their child to go in the education system. At the age of 13, young people themselves were asked about their educational expectations. An interesting feature of the findings is the mismatch between parental and young people's reports.

This paper uses multilevel cross-classified models, taking account of both primary and second-level school attended, to address the following research questions:

- What aspects of social background influence parental and young people's aspirations at the age of 13?
- Does any mismatch between parental and young people's expectations vary by social background?
- To what extent does the primary and secondary school attended make a difference to educational expectations, once social background is taken into account?
- Are any such school-level differences related to the social mix of the school?

Contribution: The paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of the intergenerational transmission of educational inequality and to the role of school context in shaping such inequality.

'They know what's ahead of them in September' Protective factors in the transition from primary to secondary school for students with special educational needs

Selina McCoy (ESRI)

Joanne Banks (ESRI)

Michael Shevlin (TCD)

Session A, Hogan Mezzanine Theatre

Context: The importance of the transition from primary to secondary school has been the subject of much debate in recent decades. This transition represents one of the key transitions in the educational career of young people. Much of the research in this area has focused on the challenge young people face in a different learning environment with new social structures. Less is known about the transition difficulties of students with special educational needs.

Methods: This mixed-methods paper draws on two longitudinal research studies, the *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI) study and the National Survey of Schools to examine the extent to which students with different types of SEN experience additional transition barriers to their peers.

Results: The findings show that young people with special educational needs are far more likely to experience a negative transition to secondary school. Furthermore, the type of need matters with those with general learning disabilities and those with intellectual disabilities at greater risk of a poor transition experience compared to young people with other types of needs. Poor transition is also influenced by gender, with girls more likely than boys to experience a difficult transition and socio economic status, with students from economically vulnerable households more likely to have a negative transition.

Conclusions: This paper highlights the need for more formalised links between primary and post-primary particularly in relation to academic and social supports for students with special educational needs.

Session B: Davin Suite

Factors associated with the development and well-being of Irish children at 9 months and 3 years

Cristina Taut (TCD), Lina Zgaga (TCD)

Session B, Davin Suite

Context: Previous large volume of research suggests that contextual aspects from children's lives can influence their development.

Methods: This study used Wave 1 (baseline, 9-months) and Wave 2 (follow-up, 3-years) data from the Infant Cohort of GUI. At each time-point, for each child, outcomes expressing 1.health and physical development, 2.socio-emotional and 3.cognitive-motor functioning were summarized into corresponding domain scores. Children's scores on the three domains formed corresponding scales. A Well-Being Index was generated as a summary of the three scales. Next, potential determinants of development and well-being were selected according to the bio-ecological model of human development and Barker hypothesis. Five main groups were identified: 1.individual characteristics, 2.child's interactions, 3.PCG and family, 4.socio-demographic and economic and 5.pre-natal factors. To investigate predictors of domain development and overall well-being 8 fully adjusted linear regression models (4 for baseline and 4 for follow-up) having as outcome variables each Domain Scale and Well-Being Index were constructed. Determinants significantly associated with the scales or index in unadjusted analysis were initially included as explanatory variables. An automatic step-wise regression with forward selection approach was employed.

Results: A comprehensive set of factors that can contribute, or undermine domain-development and well-being of Irish children was established. Some important findings were that being a boy and higher levels of PCG stress and depression were significantly associated with poorer domain and well-being scores at both time-points. In contrast, a more positive relationship between PCG and child, PCG and SCG or frequent home learning activities were associated with improved development. Baseline scores from each Domain Scale and the Well-being Index were positively associated with follow-up results.

Conclusions: Developmental determinants can be viewed as inputs to children's lives. These are modifiable factors that are most often targeted by public policy makers aiming to improve children well-being and development

A novel approach to investigating trauma and psychopathology in childhood – combining factor analysis with network analysis

Colm Healy (RCSI)

Mary Cannon (RCSI)

Session B, Davin Suite

Background: A commonly reported phenomenon is the link between childhood trauma and psychopathology. However, few investigations have looked at the structure of the interaction between different traumas and different psychopathology phenotypes.

Aims & Methods: Using the Child Cohort data from '*Growing Up in Ireland*', the aims of this study were to: identify the main constructs underlying different childhood traumas, examine the relationship between constructs of trauma and psychopathology phenotypes using network analysis and to compare network structures of 'healthy' children and those with psychopathology. 19 early life traumas were used in a factor analysis to investigate the core constructs underlying such experiences. A weighted bi/directed network analysis was conducted using the trauma constructs and the different sub-scales of the SDQ. Finally, separate networks were constructed for 'healthy' children and those with psychopathology.

Results: Seven trauma constructs were identified - home conflict, family detachment, bullying (general), orthographic bullying, moving, family death/illness, other death/illness. The network analysis revealed that there was a strong interconnectedness between the SDQ sub-scales and that only bullying and home conflict interacted with these sub-scales. The network structure of 'healthy' children and children with psychopathology vastly differed. Children with psychopathology had an array of specific trauma-psychopathology connections. Comparatively, only bullying was related to the SDQ sub-scales of 'healthy' children.

Discussion: Within a community sample of 9-year old children there are strong transdiagnostic relationships between different psychopathological phenotypes and limited effect of traumas beyond bullying. However, children with psychopathology have distinct trauma-specific network which vastly differ from their peers.

Session C: Nally Suite

Estimate the effect of early-life antibiotic exposures on the associated risk of being obese and overweight at age 5

Barrie Tyner (School of Public Health, UCC)

Session C, Nally Suite

Context: Antibiotics have been used in the agricultural industry as growth-performers since 1946. Recently small-scale human studies demonstrate that antibiotics perturb the intestinal microbiome (IM) causing dysbiosis leading to metabolic disorder. Large-scale observational studies have been conducted but results are inconsistent. Worryingly, children are both the most prescribed age group for antibiotics and are the most vulnerable because of the critical window of development for establishment of the IM.

Methods: Population based cohort study using the *Growing Up in Ireland* dataset (n=6774). Exposure/covariate data collected at 9 months and 3 years of age by administered survey to primary caregiver. Outcome measured using calibrated instruments at age 5. Multinomial logistic regression used to investigate the associations of different levels and periods of exposure and the additive effect of combining Caesarean section (CS) with exposure. No exposure to antibiotics as comparison group. Patient payment status was further evaluated.

Results: Children exposed to three to five and six or more courses of antibiotics were associated with 1.23 and 1.36 times higher risk of being overweight [$p < 0.05$, CI (1.01, 1.51)] [$p < 0.05$, CI (1.01, 1.49)], and 1.71 and 2.78 times higher risk of being obese [$p < 0.001$, CI (1.18, 2.47)] [$p < 0.001$, CI (1.77, 4.35)], respectively. Having 6 or more exposures and born by CS was twice the relative risk ratio of being obese as having 6 exposures and born by vaginal delivery when fully adjusted.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that early-life exposure may lead to weight-gain and CS may have an additive effect.

Maternal perceptions of child weight status during early childhood

M Queally (NUIG), E Doherty (NUIG),
J Cullinan (NUIG), J Harrington (UCC),
P M Kearney (UCC)

Session C, Nally Suite

Context: Early childhood is a time in which eating and exercise habits are shaped by parents. Parental recognition of obesity during early childhood is a key determinant in the relationship of achieving healthy weight status in children.

Aims: We aimed to explore mothers' perceptions of their child's weight status, as defined by the child's body mass index; what factors influence inaccurate maternal weight perception along with the persistence of weight misclassification over time.

Methods: Using two waves of the longitudinal *Growing Up in Ireland* study when children are aged three and five years, data regarding maternal weight perception, socioeconomic status, measured height and weight were obtained for mothers and their children. Using probit models we estimated the marginal effects of the likelihood of mothers misclassifying their child's weight status.

Results: Mothers with a higher BMI were more likely to misclassify their child's weight with significant positive marginal effects of 0.090; while mothers with a higher educational attainment were less likely to do so ($p < 0.00$). Mothers that had frequent contact with healthcare professionals were also less likely to misclassify their child's weight status. Moreover, misclassifying the child's weight at age three was a significant predictor of doing so again at age five with positive marginal effects of 0.285.

Conclusions: Mothers show poor awareness of their child's weight during early childhood. This finding along with the fact that weight misclassification at age three is likely to lead to misclassification at age five has important implications for obesity prevention policies among young children.

Session D: Hogan Mezzanine Theatre

What you do versus who you are: Home learning activities, social origin and cognitive skills among young children in Ireland

Patricia McMullin (University of Turku)
Frances McGinnity (ESRI),
Aisling Murray (ESRI), Helen Russell (ESRI)

Session D, Hogan Mezzanine Theatre

Context: Social gradients in cognitive outcomes are visible from an early age (Cunha and Heckman 2007). Numerous studies using different measures of the home learning environment (HLE) have shown that it has considerable influence on young children's cognitive development and early educational outcomes (Anders, H.-G. Rossbach, et al. 2012; in Ireland, McGinnity et al. 2017). The Family Investment Model (FIM) suggests that class difference in educational attainment may be due to differences in family resources and investment in educationally beneficial materials, experiences, services (Duncan et al 1998).

Methods: Based on analyses from three waves of the GUI Infant Cohort, this paper uses OLS regression modelling to investigate three research questions. To what extent do childhood cognitive outcomes, measured as vocabulary, vary by different dimensions of social origin (measured by social class, education and income)? Does the home learning environment help to account for the social gradient in childhood cognitive outcomes at age 5? Do home learning activities have more beneficial effect for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (compensatory effect) or do better quality interactions/resources among the advantaged increase the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children?

Results & Conclusions: We find pronounced differences in vocabulary by social origin even at age 5. There are relatively strong independent effects for each social origin measure (education, social class, income) on vocabulary scores. Home learning activities vary only moderately by social origin and help explain just a small part of education differences and none of the income or social class differences in vocabulary. We find some compensatory effect of home learning activities on vocabulary scores of children from low income households, but no such finding for low education or low social class. One possible explanation

is that family income can vary temporally, whereas maternal education is less varied over time.

Which factors can predict students' problem solving skills? The case of nine-year olds in Ireland

Vasiliki Pitsia (NCI), Gráinne Kent (NCI)

Session D, Hogan Mezzanine Theatre

Context: Problem-solving, the ability to engage in complex cognitive processes in response to problem situations, is a critical 21st century life skill. However, especially in Ireland, limited research has explored the factors which may be associated with the development of a child's problem-solving skills. Therefore, the aim of the current study was to explore the relationships of specific individual and environmental factors with children's problem solving abilities, as perceived by their teachers.

Methods: The current study involved secondary analysis of nationally representative data from the *Growing Up in Ireland* nine-year-old cohort (n=8,500). In exploring the relationships of specific factors with the development of a child's problem solving skills, descriptive statistics and bivariate analyses were employed.

Results: According to the findings, teachers rated boys and students who were not born in Ireland as better problem solvers. Moreover, problem solving skills were found to be positively associated with factors indicating family socio-economic status, such as income, parental education level and the number of books at home. Competencies in other areas were also positively associated with problem solving skills; the strongest relationships being for mathematical and comprehension skills. Finally, the school environment was found to be a positive factor related to problem solving skills.

Discussion: At a time of much debate over educational reform, the findings of the present research study significantly contribute towards a better understanding of the factors that are linked to problem solving skills. Specific educational practices focusing on ensuring Irish children have the skills to progress and prosper in the 21st century society will be discussed.

Session E: Davin Suite

Rethinking parental values, aspirations and practices. Qualitative evidence from the *Growing Up in Ireland Study*

Jane Gray (Maynooth University)

Session E, Davin Suite

Context: Recent scholarship raises questions about class differences in parental values, aspirations and practices. In surveys, middle-class parents prioritize values associated with autonomy, but working-class parents prioritize conformity. However, parents pursue 'paradoxical pathways' towards realizing their values: middle class parents engage in 'concerted cultivation' whereas working class parents adhere to a culture of 'natural growth.' Adding further complexity, in-depth interviews reveal contradictions and ambivalences within and across classes.

Methods: This paper makes sense of the evidence through an analysis of parent interviews from the qualitative study with the GUI Child Cohort. We used 'abductive analysis' to identify patterns in parents' responses on hopes and dreams for their children.

Results: We identified four shared 'cultural configurations': standing back and not 'pushing'; cultivating achievement; promoting happiness; fostering positive relationships. There were class differences in the weights parents attached to the configurations, and in how they addressed implicit contradictions between them. Notably, upper-income parents described their efforts to 'nudge' children in their preferred direction. By contrast, lower-income parents' support for 'standing back' was associated with lack of belief in their ability to shape their children's futures.

Conclusions: Understanding class differences in parental values, aspirations and practices is important for social policy, since these differences have been linked to variations in educational attainment and the reproduction of social inequality. Our analysis reveals that, rather than adhering to different values and aspirations, Irish parents mobilize shared sets of values and aspirations differently. The paper also shows the potential for qualitative research to refine quantitative measures and explanations.

Growing up healthy in families across the globe: the challenge of harmonising five longitudinal child cohort studies

Patty Doran (University of Manchester)

Session E, Davin Suite

Context: Children develop best when raised in functioning and supportive families. The 'Growing up healthy in families across the globe' project aims to compare outcomes from UK/EU child cohort longitudinal studies to Aotearoa/New Zealand (NZ) based studies.

Methods: The project brings together five of the most important studies (in terms of child development) with relevance to NZ. The Pacific Islands Family Study, Te Hoe Nuku Roa (Māori Families Longitudinal Study) and the triad of Growing Up studies (NZ, Ireland and Scotland) provide a detailed combined dataset with high analytical potential for Māori, Pasifika and NZ European, but also with strong European comparators from very similar countries (Ireland/Scotland). The jurisdictions and settings in Ireland and Scotland are relevant and similar to NZ in terms of population size, government, health and education systems, dual languages, and inequalities. The longitudinal studies have been compared in relation to study design, contextual development and conceptual frameworks.

Results: Initial stages of the project are complete and have resulted in a combined overview of the context and structure of the five studies. Similarities and differences have been highlighted. The relevant measures and tools used across the five studies are now being identified and the potential for a combined harmonised dataset is being considered.

Conclusions: This paper will discuss the challenges and tasks involved when considering linking and harmonising the data. New analysis from a harmonised dataset could provide a unique longitudinal view where change over time would be emphasised to determine how and why environments change, which environments are supportive and which are not. The insights will be of interest to all those concerned with child development in contemporary NZ, Ireland, Scotland and other similar countries.

Session F: Nally Suite

Educational aspirations and achievement of migrant children and young people in Ireland

Merike Darmody (ESRI)

Session F, Nally Suite

Abstract: Academic achievement is one of the main indicators of various post-school outcomes. Influenced by structural and personal factors, it is unequally distributed across different groups of children and young people, including those of immigrant origin. Increasing migration across the world has sparked interest in how immigrant-origin children and youth fare in the educational systems of the receiving countries. While international studies have shown that some national-origin groups do better in school than others, it is important to remember that immigrant-origin children are a very diverse group differing by their countries of origin, legal status and their socioeconomic background. Existing international research has also referred to 'immigrant optimism' whereby migrants, especially first generation migrants, have high hopes for their children. Migrant children, especially from some national groups, also tend to have high aspirations. However, often high motivation and aspiration does not translate into high achievement, resulting in what has become known as aspiration-achievement paradox. This paper focusses on the academic achievement of immigrant-origin young people in Irish primary and secondary schools drawing on the *Growing Up in Ireland* study. In doing so, it specifically focusses on aspirations of parents and students themselves, students' educational experiences in primary and secondary schools, and finally, their academic achievement.

Mental health of young migrants in Ireland- an analysis of the 'Growing up in Ireland' Child Cohort study

Sorcha Cotter (Maastricht University)

Colm Healy (RCSI)

Dearbhail Ni Cathain (RCSI)

Mary Clarke (RCSI), Mary Cannon (RCSI)

Session F, Nally Suite

Context: Stressful life events are one of the leading risk factors for psychological distressing in children and adolescents. Previous studies have highlighted the stressful events which displaced children may endure before and during migration and the challenges re-adjusting into a new society and culture. Such distressing circumstances can often lead to differences in the mental health status of migrant children when compared with native adolescents.

Methods: We investigated the effects triadic relationship between migration, psychological distress and stressful events in young children. Using the 'Growing up in Ireland' (GUI) study's Child Cohort (Wave 1 and 2), we cross-sectionally and longitudinally investigated the relationship between multiple stressful life events and psychological distress (using the Strengths and difficulties questionnaire, SDQ) in Irish and migrant children.

Results: The results revealed that Irish children experienced a greater number of stressful life events than their migrant counterparts ($p < .01$). However, there was no significant variation in overall psychological distress between migrant and Irish children ($p > .05$). Analysis of the SDQ sub-scales revealed that a significantly greater proportion of migrant children endorsed hyperactivity problems at age 9 but that a greater proportion of Irish children experienced emotional problems at age 13.

Conclusion: Counter to expectation, we observed that native Irish children are more likely to experience stressful life events than their migrant peers and there are few differences in the psychological wellbeing. An increased understanding of the stressful events experienced by migrant and native children and indeed their resultant psychological wellbeing, could aid health professionals and policy makers to effectively tailor interventions for mental health promotion.

Session G: Hogan Mezzanine Theatre

Cariogenic food and drink consumption and dental problems in 3 and 5-year olds in the GUI Infant Cohort

M. Crowe (Dublin Dental University Hospital, TCD), **M. O'Sullivan** (Dublin Dental University Hospital, TCD), **O. Cassetti** (Dublin Dental University Hospital, TCD), **A. O' Sullivan** (Institute of Food and Health, UCD)

Session G, Hogan Mezzanine Theatre

Background: Most dental problem visits before 5 years of age are related to early childhood caries (ECC) - an infectious disease modified by diet. An unfavourable intake of cariogenic food and drink (CF) is a key risk factor for the initiation and progression of ECC. The aim of this study was to compare CF consumption between 3 and 5 years of age and if this was associated with the need for dental attendance.

Methods: Data from the second (n=9,793) and third (n=9,001) waves of the GUI Infant Cohort were merged and the pattern of CF intake was analysed using R Studio (Version 1.0.136).

Results: The prevalence of children with a dental problem increased from 5% at 3 years of age to 16% at 5 years of age. The overall intake of CF was high compared to recommended dietary guidelines for children. However, there was no relationship between CF intake and prevalence of dental problems at 3 or 5 years. The main sources of CF were similar at both time points but the more detailed FFQ at 5 years allowed a finer breakdown of the sources of CF.

Conclusions: There was no relationship between specific CF foods and dental attendance at 3 or 5 years of age although the consumption of CF was higher than is recommended. Further investigation including a more complex analysis of patterns of CF intake including amounts and frequency may provide a better understanding of this relationship.

Socio-economic inequalities in measured body mass index trajectories in 41,669 children in three European countries

Cathal McCrory (TCD)

Session G, Hogan Mezzanine Theatre

Background: This study examines socio-economic differentials in children's body mass trajectories in infancy, childhood and adolescence using data from four contemporary European child cohorts.

Methods: Data on body mass index (BMI) measured on at least three occasions between birth and adolescence was obtained from four prospective cohort studies – *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI - Ireland) (Infant and Child Cohorts), Generation XXI (G21 - Portugal), and the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS - UK) – involving a total sample of 41,619 children. Socio-economic differentials in children's BMI trajectories were modelled by maternal educational level (primary, secondary, tertiary) using hierarchical models with fixed and random components for each cohort study.

Results: BMI gain was greater for children of lower educated mothers. Socio-economic differences in children's BMI were evident as early as 3 years of age and continued to widen thereafter. In GUI, the mean difference in BMI between polarised educational groupings amounted to 0.88 for boys [CI95=0.60, 1.17] and 1.32 [CI95=1.09, 1.71] for girls at 13 years of age. In G21, boys and girls from primary educated backgrounds measured 0.74 [CI95=0.52, 0.95] and 0.42 [CI95=0.23, 0.61] kg/m² heavier at 7 years of age compared with the tertiary educated. In MCS, the educational differential was 0.82 for boys [CI95=0.61, 1.03] for and 0.76 [CI95=0.54, 0.99] for girls at 14 years of age.

Conclusion: Maternal education is a strong predictor of BMI across different European nations. Socio-economic differentials emerge in early childhood and widen over the early years, highlighting the need to for early intervention.

Session H: Davin Suite

Maternal age and socio-emotional, behavioural and cognitive outcomes in middle childhood and early adolescence

Daráine Murphy (ESRI)

James Williams (ESRI)

Session H, Davin Suite

Context: This paper considers the relationship between mother's age at the birth of the child and the child's socio-emotional, behavioural and cognitive outcomes at 9 and 13 years of age. There has been substantial debate in the literature on the nature and strength of the relationship between maternal age and child outcomes, and the persistence of this effect, even into adulthood. For example, Fergusson and Woodward (1999) cite a lengthy literature dating to the early 1980's which suggests that the effects of the early disadvantages experienced by the children of younger mothers persist into adolescence and early adulthood, citing, for example, Brook-Gunn and Furstenberg, 1986; Card and Wise, 1981; Furstenberg et al., 1987; Nagin, Pogarsky and Farrington, 1997 (Fergusson and Woodward, 1999, p. 479). More recent studies support these early findings (Tearne, 2015), with, Bornstein et al (2006) noting that many of the trends identified in the relationship between maternal age and child outcomes may derive from less optimal parenting practices among younger mothers or the 'maternal maturity hypothesis', which suggests that older mothers are likely to benefit from greater psychological preparedness, life experience and resources (p877).

Methods: The paper uses data from the 9-year and 13-year interviews with the child cohort from *Growing Up in Ireland*. Controlling for the characteristics of the child's mother, the child's family and the child him/herself, the paper uses regression analysis to consider the nature and strength of the relationship between mother's age at the birth of the child and the child's socio-emotional, behavioural and cognitive outcomes at 9 and 13 years of age.

Results: The paper finds that increasing maternal age is associated with a lower risk of socio-emotional and behavioural problems and a higher chance of positive outcomes on achievement and cognitive tests.

Neighbourhood matters: neighbourhood effects on children's emotional and behavioural outcomes

Amanda Quail (ESRI)

Session H, Davin Suite

Context: This study examined the relationship between neighbourhoods and nine-year-old children's emotional and behavioural outcomes. Neighbourhoods were classified according to two measures of disadvantage – socioeconomic status (SES) and residential instability. Children's outcomes focussed on both internalising problems (such as anxiety, depression and withdrawal) and externalising problems (such as rule-breaking and aggressive behaviour), which were recorded using their parents' report of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. In addition, the study included a range of neighbourhood-level (institutional resources, safety, social capital and social organisation) and family-level (family functioning, parental depression, home learning environment and parenting style) processes through which it was hypothesised that neighbourhoods may influence children's emotional and behavioural outcomes.

Methods: The study used data from the Child Cohort (n=7,507) of *Growing Up in Ireland* – the National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland – to run a series of multilevel regression models which tested for relationships between the predictors and the outcomes while controlling for the clustering of children within neighbourhoods.

Results: The results showed that children in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods (in terms of SES) had higher levels of internalising and externalising behaviours, even when controlling for all other neighbourhood, family and individual factors. Children in neighbourhoods with few institutional resources, poor perceived safety, low levels of social capital and poor social organisation had poorer outcomes, as did children from families with poor family functioning, parental depression and harsh parenting styles. Coming from a family with a poor home learning environment was related to poorer externalising behaviours. **Conclusions:** The results of this study support the belief that neighbourhood matters and show that growing up in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, with few institutional resources, low levels of safety, social capital and social organisation had a detrimental impact on children's emotional and behavioural well-being. Neighbourhood disadvantage was further related to family-level processes such as poor family functioning, parental depression, poor home learning environments and less than ideal parenting styles which further negatively impact on children's outcomes.

Session I: Nally Suite

Polarisation or convergence? contrasting relative and absolute measures of group differences

Dorothy Watson (ESRI),
Christopher Whelan (UCD),
Bertrand Maitre (ESRI),
James Williams (ESRI)

Session I, Nally Suite

Context: We find differences in the impact of the recession on social classes and family types depending on whether we measure the differences in relative or absolute sense. Relative measures showing convergence of risk and absolute measures suggest polarisation of risk. We ask under what circumstances relative or absolute measures are useful.

Methods: We draw on the *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI) data for the cohort born in 1998, examining outcomes such as economic vulnerability and economic stress by social class and family type.

Results: The conclusions regarding polarisation or convergence differ depending on whether we look at relative or absolute differences. We outline the desirable properties of a measure of change and assess the relative merits of the relative and absolute indicators against this criterion.

Conclusions: We discuss when different approaches (relative or absolute measures) are useful.

Perception of income inequality among children

Aisling Murray (ESRI)
James Williams (ESRI)

Session I, Nally Suite

Background: In the Ireland of 2007, there was an economic boom that brought prosperity for the

majority of – though not all – families. Still, wealth is to some extent a relative concept and it may be that the perception of being ‘worse off’ matters regardless of the actual financial position of the household.

Aims and methods: So what might be the effect on child well-being if they perceive economic inequality relative to children from other families? And why do some children perceive economic hardship or inequality while others in the same financial situation appear oblivious?

Using the Growing Up in Ireland Child Cohort data (age 9 years in 2007), we describe the frequency of children perceiving themselves to be economically worse off than other children. We look at what income-related characteristics are associated with perceptions of inequality.

Results: Just over 7% of 9-year-olds surveyed in 2007 thought they were worse off than at least one of the comparison groups; but while disadvantaged children were more likely to perceive inequality the majority seemed largely unaware of it. There was some evidence that the child’s negative perceptions of their area and the household lacking key items such as new clothes and furniture are associated with greater perceived income inequality. An initial look at the impact of that perceived inequality on socio-emotional well-being finds a modest but significant association with less positive self-concept score and worse teacher-rated behavioural assessments even when actual household income is controlled for.

Conclusions: While the majority of children living in economically disadvantaged households did not recognise this fact, feeling ‘worse off’ than others may have an impact on self-concept and behaviour. Neighbourhood, as well as household, characteristics seem to play a role in a child’s perception of being materially ‘worse off’.



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