



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

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Introduction

- **This paper is based upon analysis of the interviews with nine year old children in the 120 families who took part in the nested qualitative component of the Growing Up in Ireland study.**
- **The data was accessed through the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA) in December 2011**



Theoretical Background

Sociology of Childhood theorists stress

- the importance of children's experience in the present
- children as agents who actively construct their own lives and influence their relationships with family and friends

Current thinking in the field of **child well-being** emphasises the need to directly consult children as experts in their own lives

- Move from data being collected on or from children to being actively involved in measuring and monitoring their own well-being
- Move from children being seen as the objects of research to children's agency being increasingly recognised and reflected in the research process



Recent research findings on child well-being

- **Fattore and colleagues (Fattore et al 2007;2009) consulted children aged 8-15 years on their understanding of well-being- important contribution of relationships with others, having a sense of agency and feeling safe. Activities were found to be the ‘contexts in which children experience and negotiate competencies and relationships and may also have “fun”.**
- **A recent quantitative study of 4673 children in England (Goswami 2011) examined the relative impact of different relations on children’s well-being and found that relationships with family, positive relationships with friends and experience of being bullied were the three top influences.**



Aim of this analysis

- **To explore children's perspectives on their daily lives particularly with regard to their relationships with their family and friends and experience of peer bullying.**
- **Their daily activities outside of school were examined with a view to considering their importance as a context for negotiation of relationships.**



Data, Method and Analysis

- **120 child interviews**
- **semi structured interviews lasting between 45 and 100 mins**
- **150 possible questions in 8 interview sections covering 6 domains**
- **Adult from the household present**
- **For this analysis 2 domains selected: 'child relationships' and 'family and parenting'**
- **The 'Who Is In My Family', 'My Family and Me Ma' and an 'Activities Calendar' tasks were used as prompts**
- **Predominantly Content analysis with some limited inductive analysis around activities**



Findings

- **Children's conceptualisations of family were wide including immediate and extended family as well as pets and deceased members of the family**
- **Vast majority of children were surrounded by the love, commitment and protection of their immediate and wider families**
- **Parents, even when separated, spent a great deal of time with the children-sense of mutual joy and shared fun**
- **Children able to successfully negotiate a range of relationships in lone parent, separated parent and reconstituted families**



Findings

- **Sadness and loss experienced around parental separation and bereavement**
- **Relationships with siblings varied and fluctuated**
- **Grandparents made a very important contribution to their lives**
- **Children differentiated between the wider family network and those they felt closest to which included mothers, fathers, usually a sibling and often one or more grandparents**
- **The key characteristic of these close relationships was the children's sense of trust in these people**



Findings

- **Spending time and doing things together was not only important to the children but also the means by which the children maintained and developed the relationships with family members e.g. with non-resident fathers**
- **Conversely, not feeling close to members of resident family members was associated with lack of availability to spend time with them. The examples given were of fathers who had limited time due to work commitments**



findings

- **Both boys and girls were strongly engaged in structured after school activities which they enjoyed**
- **Motivation was often influenced by family and friends**
- **Most children had some balance between structured activities and free time**
- **Some children's lives, however, were 'hurried'**
- **Children saw their free time as their 'own time' when they could choose who to play with and what to do ie marked by their exercise of choice and control**



Findings

- **They distinguished friends as those you could trust and turn to-sense of relaxation and safety in their company**
- **Both structured and unstructured were associated with mastery of competences, new experiences and fun but their 'free time' was where they relaxed, enjoyed close friendships and making decisions about what to do, where and with whom.**



Findings

- **Many of the children indicated that they had directly experienced bullying**
- **And almost all of the children were very conscious of the fact that they could be bullied at any time.**
- **Children actively ensured that they were surrounded by friends to feel safe and secure.**



Concluding points

- **The fact that the GUI study included interviews with children is to be commended-comparable studies in Australia and Canada have not. The intention of providing a greater depth of understanding of children's perspectives was realised.**
- **Again the involvement of children to advise on the methodology was very much in line with latest international thinking in this field.**
- **The presence of parents during their interviews, however, is likely to have influenced the children's responses especially in relation to family relationships.**
- **As the cohorts of children are followed over time and the young people and their parents become more familiar with the research process, perhaps the young people will have the opportunity to share their own views in confidence.**



References

McAuley, C., McKeown, C. and Merriman, B. (2012) Spending Time with Family and Friends: Children's Views on Relationships and Shared Activities. *Child Indicators Research* 5 (3) 449-467.

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What the children said about family relationships

I: *Ok, and what about your mum, how do you get on with her?*

C: *Really, really well. Every day after school we talk...we have a chat. It's not very often but sometimes we play with each other and just last week we were dancing with each other in the kitchen*
(boy)

I: *So how come you put everyone in the green circle (indicating closest relationships)?*

C: *Because if ever I have a problem I go to my mum and she is always there for me and does lots of things for me*
(girl)



What the children said about loss and death

I: *And how did you feel when your dad left?*

C: *Really upset*

(girl)

I: *Is there anything that might worry you at the moment?*

C: *The way my granddad died...I am kind of worried about my nana.*



What the children said about friends and bullying

Em, well, friends are someone you can talk to or you'd be round with a lot and you could go to if you're feeling sad or something (girl)

I: *Are there any kids around here?*

C: *Yeah, there's loads of kids but we don't really like them 'cause some of them bully me. There's a X year old who bullies me.*

I: *What does that feel like?*

C: *Terrible, embarrassing 'cause he is so much younger than me. (girl)*