



**Growing Up
in Ireland**
National Longitudinal
Study of Children

Perspectives on Parental Stress: Data from the Nine-Month Qualitative Study

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Qualitative Study

- Introduction to Qualitative Study
- Infant Cohort Profile
- Parental Stress
- Parents' Views emerging in the Qualitative Data
- Protective Factors
- What Next for the Qualitative Study?



Data Collection

Wave 1

**9 Year
2008**

**9 Month
2009**

Wave 2

**13 Year
End 2011**

**3 Year
2011**



9 Year Qualitative Study

- Themes covered:

Health & Physical Development, Feelings, Family & Relationships, Activities, Community, the future - 'When I am 13'.

- Data to be lodged in Irish Qualitative Data Archive



Children's Advisory Forum



Infant Qualitative Study 2009

- 126 9-11 month old infants including 5 sets of twins.
- 49% girls, 51% boys.
- 14% in one-parent households
- 79% from Irish backgrounds
- Semi-structured interview conducted with parents.
- Some themes: Perception of baby, routines & habits, relationship, transition to parenthood, support, work/life balance, childcare.
- Developmental assessment of the Study Infant.
- Along with observation of home environment and mothers' perception of photos of infant emotional states.



Parental Stress

- Previous qualitative research has mainly dealt with parental stress related to bringing up with a child with a disability (*Hayes & Kijox, 2006*) or chronic illness (*Sallfors & Hallberg, 2003*).
- However day-to-day stress for parents is related to a variety of emotional (guilt and anxiety) and role satisfaction (marital, job and social satisfaction) variables.
- In the quantitative study this was measured on the Parental Stress Scale (*Berry & Jones, 1995*).
- Parents reported low levels of stress, Mothers scored a mean of 32.2 and fathers a mean of 30.8 out of a maximum of 90.



Parental Stress

- High levels of contact with, and support from grandparents may account for this.
- Higher levels of parental stress were reported by lone parents, in particular those with 2 or more children.
- For those who were experiencing stress, it was in the areas of relationships, work/life balance and finance.



Parents' Views

- Parents were asked:

'Can you tell me if you have felt isolated or stressed since you have been home with the baby?'

'...you can have a lot of stress with it you know, you're just worried are you doing the right thing or em, I mean parents don't know everything automatic... it's a trial and error a lot of it and just, you just hope you're doing the best that you possibly can do'. [mother, 2 parent, urban]



Single Parent

- Single mother recalls finding out she was pregnant:

‘A bit daunting to tell you the truth, even though I wasn’t, not young and set up well enough, I found out, it was just a big shock, and the biggest ‘oh this is not happening, this is not reality.’

‘It’s taken quite a bit of adjustment but it’s more than, I’m happy with the situation now.

- Then speaks of how the child’s father is not involved:

‘he doesn’t want, he’s seen her twice and he doesn’t seem to want to be involved and that’s, I feel very sad for her, that her Dad doesn’t want to..’

[1 parent, urban]



Stress on Relationships

'Has being a parent changed your relationship with your husband?'

'I suppose so. We're, we don't have as much time like on our own together, or we don't, em I guess we used to always maybe sit and chat just the two of us every evening, whereas that doesn't really happen.'

[2 parent, urban]

Another mother states:

'yeah, we are both wrecked because we both work as well. But at the same time we are very fond of each other and we do love each other.'

When asked what she does to relax:

'Relaxing and de-stress doesn't enter the situation when you have three, Once the brighter nights come you would be able to get out again.'

[2 parent, rural]



Work/Life Balance

‘What are the good things and the difficult things about being back at work?’

‘I suppose tiredness would be one of them because of the shifts I do and not seeing [infant] for a day or two, if I am working late or early I won’t see her. The only time will be giving her a kiss in her cot and I am gone and that slightly affects me and I make it up. I do feel guilty. There is a lot to be said for women not working but it has to be done now’.

[2 parent, urban, dad unemployed]

‘I have to stay working...like that’s me life-line, do you know what I mean... And I look at it basically, it’s the food in their mouths and the clothes on their backs’.

[2 parent, urban, dad unemployed]



At Home with Baby

- Parents were asked:

‘What are the good things and difficult things about being at home with baby?’

‘Well the bad thing is that it’s not like your office work or whatever, you can’t just walk away and leave it behind you’.

‘But the good things is that your are here for your children and you do get to see them do everything, instead of having other people report it back to you ...’Oh guess what he did today?’

[2 parent, rural]



Financial Concerns

- Fathers expressed strong worries about financial security:

‘Yeah, I think we are facing into a recession which is quite worrying, I think it is going to be worse than the 80’s ever was.. and I think we’re not prepared for it’.

Mum: *‘We would go to work barefooted to get the kids the education we want them to get, you know. And I think that is natural for parents.’*

‘We are the type of people too that...if we thought in 5 years time that the Irish economy was on its head, and there was no future, we’d just pack bags and leave, and we’d move to whatever culture or economy was going well.’

[2 parent, urban]



Father's Views

'What is it like becoming a parent again?'

'the biggest shock of my life.... and because I had additional shifts with work I was just getting more tired, It was a huge shock in that sense...'

'Is being a parent different from what you thought it was going to be?'

Yeah. It is better than I thought.... I used to laugh at lads that I work with, when they'd be talking about kids I'd be going, 'That 'll never happen to me!', you know. But it's not at all what you expect. It's better.' [2 parental, rural]



Protective Factors

- Protective factors against parental stress impacting on the infant include:
 - Temperament of Infant
 - Parent-Infant Relationship
 - Dealing with Stress
 - Support Network



Attachment

High levels of attachment were reported and parents spoke of their infants:

‘Brilliant like, very joyful child like. Pure happy with him basically. Never have any trouble with him like..’ [1 parent, urban]

‘She is my temperament...she’s quite, she can be fiery. Em, I think she makes me laugh, cause I think she is like me’. [1 parent, urban]

‘Love, happiness and joy, and it is great, she was supposed to be a boy and then she turned out to be a girl, so it was a great surprise.’

[2 parent, rural]



Dealing With Stress

Parents were asked what they did to relax:

'[Study infant's dad] plays golf so I suppose he's not ..he has got that little outlet for him, which he loves... and em, I do enjoy going to work, which might sound sad, but I actually don't mind going to work 2 days a week.'

'If I am in the car...it is my quiet zone, I am in a little planet of my own, listening to the radio and I enjoy it. ..I don't even mind if I am stuck in traffic which sounds really barmy...cause it is my quiet hour until I get to work and then...'

[2 parent, county town]



Dealing With Stress

Another mum describes how her partner sometimes organises the breakfast to give her a lie in. But if things get stressed:

'If I said that I was cracking up, I wanted to get out, I would get the car keys, he would mind the kids and I would go into my sisters for an hour or two.'

[2 parent, rural]



Support Network

- 89% of mothers were in regular contact with the Study Infants grandparents.
- 72% reported that they ‘got enough’ help and support from family and friends.
- In the qualitative interview, parents were asked:
‘Tell me how supported you feel in bringing up baby?’



Lack of Support

- Single parent talks about lack of support from infant's father:

'He is fairly uselessI mean, he might see her one week and not the other and I'm trying to organize something a bit more steady so that he is either going to see her or not at all – that's what I'm asking for, I just think it will be better for her'.

[2 parent, rural]



Parenting Support

‘The grandparents are fantastic. My mother is actually staying over tonight give me a hand in the morning.’

[2 parent, urban]

‘We don’t have many grandparents or anything like that here to mind the children for us. The only time we have really is to sit down in the evening’.

[2 parent, rural, non-Irish]

‘All the parents, we all know each other, and we have play dates too – they drop off their kids or we drop off our kids, just to give ourselves a little bit of time together too’.

[2 parent, rural, non-Irish]



Grandparent Support

- A single mum has her mother for support and values her big garden:

‘And do you even feel isolated or stressed?’

‘Ah no. A small bit stressed when they start fighting and pulling... so sometimes I go to my mothers. They need a bit of a run outside and some fresh air’. [1 parent, urban]

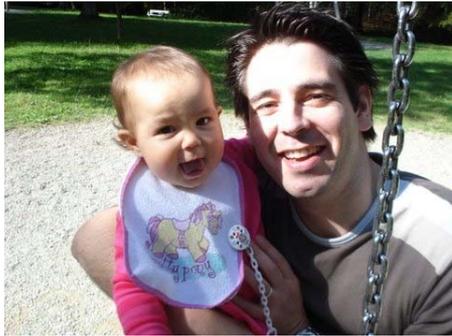
To relax she does something very simple:

‘Whenever they go down to sleep around 7 that is when I have my time, an hour or two to do whatever I want.... I just sit down and read a magazine and relax, you know.’



What Next for Qualitative Study?

- Longitudinal Study: returning to the infants' families in Spring 2011.
- Pilot study has been undertaken of protocols for use with the Infants at 3 Years.
- 9 Year Olds will be visited again Autumn 2011 when they are 13 years.
- 9 Year data to be lodged in Irish Qualitative Data Archive.



Growing Up in Ireland Research Conference 2010